A

VIEW

OF THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

VOL. I.

A

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OF THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

IN THREE PARTS.

PART I. Of the direct Hiſtorical Evidence of Chriſtianity, and wherein it is diſtinguiſhed from the Evidence alledged for other Miracles.

PART II. Of the Auxiliary Evidences of Chriſtianity.

PART III. A brief Conſideration of ſome popular Objections.

BY WILLIAM PALEY, M. A.

ARCHDEACON OF CARLISLE.

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TO THE

HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

JAMES YORK, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF ELY.

MY LORD,

WHEN five years ago an important ſtation in the Univerſity of Cambridge awaited your Lordſhip's diſpoſal, you were pleaſed to offer it to me. The circumſtances, under which this offer was made, demand a public acknowledgement. I had never ſeen your Lordſhip: I poſſeſſed no connection which could poſſibly recommend me to your favour: I was known to you, only by my endeavours, in common with

many others, to diſcharge my duty as a tutor in the Univerſity; and by ſome very imperfect, but certainly well intended, and, as you thought, uſeful publications ſince. In an age by no means wanting in examples of honourable patronage, although this deſerve not to be mentioned in reſpect of the object of your Lordſhip's choice, it is inferior to none in the purity and diſintereſtedneſs of the motives which ſuggeſted it.

How the following work may be received, I pretend not to foretell. My firſt prayer concerning it is, that it may do good to any: my ſecond hope, that it may aſſiſt what it hath always been my earneſt wiſh to promote, the religious part of an academical education. If in this latter view it might ſeem, in any degree, to excuſe your Lordſhip's

judgement of its author, I ſhall be gratified by the reflection, that, to a kindneſs flowing from public principles, I have made the beſt public return in my power.

In the mean time, and in every event, I rejoice in the opportunity here afforded me, of teſtifying the ſenſe I entertain of your Lordſhip's conduct, and of a notice which I regard as the moſt flattering diſtinction of my life.

I am,
My Lord,
With ſentiments of gratitude
and reſpect,
Your Lordſhip's faithful
And moſt obliged ſervant,

W. PALEY.

CONTENTS

OF THE

FIRST VOLUME.

Preparatory Conſiderations—Of the antecedent credibility of miracles — — p. 1

PART I.

OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY; AND WHEREIN IT IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEDGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES.

Propoſitions ſtated — — p. 17, 18

PROP. I.

That there is ſatisfactory evidence, that many profeſſing to be original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted, from the ſame motives, to new rules of conduct — — p. 19

CHAP. I.

Evidence of the ſufferings of the firſt propagators of Chriſtianity, from the nature of the caſe — ibid.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Evidence of the ſufferings of the firſt propagators of Chriſtianity from Profane Teſtimony — p. 42

CHAP. III.

Indirect evidence of the ſufferings of the firſt propagators of Chriſtianity, from the Scriptures and other ancient Chriſtian writings — — p. 55

CHAP. IV.

Direct evidence of the ſame — — p. 66

CHAP. V.

Obſervations upon the preceding evidence — p. 95

CHAP. VI.

That the ſtory, for which the firſt propagators of Chriſtianity ſuffered, was miraculous — p. 106

CHAP. VII.

That it was in the main the ſtory which we have now proved by indirect conſiderations — p. 114

CHAP. VIII.

The ſame proved from the authority of our Hiſtorical Scriptures — — — p. 142

CHAP. IX.

Of the Authenticity of the Hiſtorical Scriptures, in Eleven Sections — — — p. 168

SECT. I. *Quotations of the Hiſtorical Scriptures by ancient Chriſtian writers* — — p. 183

SECT.

SECT. II. *Of the peculiar reſpect with which they were quoted* — — — — p. 230

SECT. III. *The ſcriptures were in very early times collected into a diſtinct volume* — p. 239

SECT. IV. *And diſtinguiſhed by appropriate names and titles of reſpect* — — p. 247

SECT. V. *Were publicly read and expounded in the religious aſſemblies of the early Chriſtians* — p 252

SECT. VI. *Commentaries, &c. were anciently written upon the ſcriptures* — — p. 257

SECT. VII. *They were received by ancient Chriſtians of different ſects and perſuaſions* — p. 268

SECT. VIII. *The four Goſpels, the Acts of the Apoſtles, thirteen Epiſtles of St. Paul, the firſt Epiſtle of John, and the firſt of Peter, were received without doubt by thoſe who doubted concerning the other books of our preſent canon* — — p. 283

SECT. IX. *Our preſent Goſpels were conſidered by the adverſaries of Chriſtianity, as containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded* — p. 292

SECT. X. *Formal catalogues of authentic Scriptures were publiſhed, in all which our preſent Goſpels were included* — — — p. 304

SECT. XI. *The above propoſitions cannot be predicated of thoſe books which are commonly called apocryphal books of the New Teſtament* — — — p. 309

CHAP. X.

Recapitulation — — — p. 320

OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WHEREIN IT IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEDGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES p. 329

PROP. II.

CHAP. I.

That there is NOT *ſatisfactory evidence, that perſons pretending to be original witneſſes of any other ſimilar miracles, have acted in the ſame manner, in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of thoſe accounts* — p. 330

CHAP. II.

Conſideration of ſome ſpecific inſtances — p. 369

Preparatory Conſiderations.

I DEEM it unneceſſary to prove that mankind ſtood in need of a revelation, becauſe I have met with no ſerious perſon who thinks that even under the Chriſtian revelation we have too much light, or any degree of aſſurance which is ſuperfluous. I deſire moreover that in judging of Chriſtianity it may be remembered, that the queſtion lies between this religion and none: for, if the Chriſtian religion be not credible, no one, with whom we have to do, will ſupport the pretenſions of any other.

Suppoſe then the world we live in to have had a Creator; ſuppoſe it to appear from

the predominant aim and tendency of the proviſions and contrivances obſervable in the univerſe, that the Deity, when he formed it, conſulted for the happineſs of his ſenſitive creation; ſuppoſe the diſpoſition which dictated this council to continue: ſuppoſe a part of the creation to have received faculties from their Maker, by which they are capable of rendering a moral obedience to his will, and of voluntarily purſuing any end for which he has deſigned them; ſuppoſe the Creator to intend for theſe his rational and accountable agents a ſecond ſtate of exiſtence in which their ſituation will be regulated by their behaviour in the firſt ſtate, by which ſuppoſition (and by no other) the objection to the divine government in not putting a difference between the good and the bad, and the inconſiſtency of this confuſion with the care and benevolence diſcoverable in the works of the Deity is done away; ſuppoſe it to be of the utmoſt importance to the ſubjects of this diſpenſation to know what is intended for them, that is, ſuppoſe the knowledge of it to be highly conducive to the

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happineſs of the ſpecies, a purpoſe which ſo many proviſions of nature are calculated to promote: Suppoſe, nevertheleſs, almoſt the whole race, either by the imperfection of their faculties, the misfortune of their ſituation, or by the loſs of ſome prior revelation, to want this knowledge, and not to be likely without the aid of a new revelation to attain it; under theſe circumſtances is it improbable that a revelation ſhould be made? Is it incredible that God ſhould interpoſe for ſuch a purpoſe? Suppoſe him to deſign for mankind a future ſtate, is it unlikely that he ſhould acquaint them with it?

Now in what way can a revelation be made but by miracles? In none which we are able to conceive. Conſequently, in whatever degree it is probable or not very improbable that a revelation ſhould be communicated to mankind at all, in the ſame degree is it probable or not very improbable that miracles ſhould be wrought. Therefore, when miracles are related to have been wrought in the promulgating of a revelation

manifeſtly wanted, and, if true, of ineſtimable value, the improbability which ariſes from the miraculous nature of the things related, is not greater than the original improbability that ſuch a revelation ſhould be imparted by God.

I wiſh it however to be correctly underſtood, in what manner, and to what extent, this argument is alledged. We do not aſſume the attributes of the Deity, or the exiſtence of a future ſtate, in order to *prove* the reality of miracles. That reality always muſt be proved by evidence. We aſſert only, that in miracles adduced in ſupport of revelation there is not any ſuch antecedent improbability as no teſtimony can ſurmount. And for the purpoſe of maintaining this aſſertion, we contend, that the incredibility of miracles related to have been wrought in atteſtation of a meſſage from God, conveying intelligence of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, and teaching mankind how to prepare themſelves for that ſtate, is not in itſelf greater than the event, call it either

either probable or improbable, of the two following propoſitions being true: namely, firſt, that a future ſtate of exiſtence ſhould be deſtined by God for his human creation; and, ſecondly, that, being ſo deſtined, he ſhould acquaint them with it. It is not neceſſary for our purpoſe that theſe propoſitions be capable of proof, or even that, by arguments drawn from the light of nature, they can be made out to be probable. It is enough that we are able to ſay concerning them, that they are not ſo violently improbable, ſo contradictory to what we already believe of the Divine power and character, that either the propoſitions themſelves, or facts ſtrictly connected with the propoſitions (and therefore no farther improbable than they are improbable), ought to be rejected at firſt ſight, and to be rejected by whatever ſtrength or complication of evidence they be atteſted.

This is the prejudication we would reſiſt. For to this length does a modern objection to miracles go, viz. that no human teſti-

mony can in any caſe render them credible. I think the reflection above ſtated, that, if there be a revelation, there muſt be miracles; and that, under the circumſtances in which the human ſpecies are placed, a revelation is not improbable, or not improbable in any great degree, to be a fair anſwer to the whole objection.

But ſince it is an objection which ſtands in the very threſhold of our argument, and, if admitted, is a bar to every proof, and to all future reaſoning upon the ſubject, it may be neceſſary, before we proceed farther, to examine the principle upon which it profeſſes to be founded: which principle is conciſely this, that it is contrary to experience that a miracle ſhould be true, but not contrary to experience that teſtimony ſhould be falſe.

Now there appears a ſmall ambiguity in the term " experience," and in the phraſes " contrary to experience," or " contradicting experience," which it may be neceſſary

to

to remove in the firſt place. Strictly ſpeaking, the narrative of a fact is *then* only contrary to experience, when the fact is related to have exiſted at a time and place, at which time and place we being preſent did not perceive it to exiſt; as if it ſhould be aſſerted, that in a particular room, and at a particular hour of a certain day, a man was raiſed from the dead, in which room, and at the time ſpecified, we being preſent and looking on perceived no ſuch event to have taken place. Here the aſſertion is contrary to experience properly ſo called; and this is a contrariety which no evidence can ſurmount. It matters nothing, whether the fact be of a miraculous nature or not. But although this be the experience, and the contrariety, which Archbiſhop Tillotſon alledged in the quotation with which Mr. Hume opens his eſſay, it is certainly not that experience, nor that contrariety, which Mr. Hume himſelf intended to object. And, ſhort of this, I know no intelligible ſignification which can be affixed to the term "contrary to experience," but one, viz. that of not having our-

ſelves experienced any thing ſimilar to the thing related, or ſuch things not being generally experienced by others. I ſay "not generally;" for to ſtate concerning the fact in queſtion, that no ſuch thing was *ever* experienced, or that *univerſal* experience is againſt it, is to aſſume the ſubject of the controverſy.

Now the improbability which ariſes from the want (for this properly is a want, not a contradiction) of experience, is only equal to the probability there is, that, if the thing were true, we ſhould experience things ſimilar to it, or that ſuch things would be generally experienced. Suppoſe it then to be true that miracles were wrought upon the firſt promulgation of Chriſtianity, when nothing but miracles could decide its authority, is it certain that ſuch miracles would be repeated ſo often, and in ſo many places, as to become objects of general experience? Is it a probability approaching to certainty? Is it a probability of any great ſtrength or force? Is it ſuch as no evidence can encounter?

counter? And yet this probability is the exact *converſe*, and therefore the exact meaſure of the improbability which ariſes from the want of experience, and which Mr. Hume repreſents as invincible by human teſtimony.

It is not like alledging a new law of nature, or a new experiment in natural philoſophy, becauſe, when theſe are related, it is expected that, under the ſame circumſtances, the ſame effect will follow univerſally; and in proportion as this expectation is juſtly entertained, the want of a correſponding experience negatives the hiſtory. But to expect concerning a miracle that it ſhould ſucceed upon repetition, is to expect that which would make it ceaſe to be a miracle, which is contrary to its nature as ſuch, and would totally deſtroy the uſe and purpoſe for which it was wrought.

The force of experience as an objection to miracles is founded in the preſumption, either that the courſe of nature is invariable,

or that, if it be ever varied, variations will be frequent and general. Has the neceſſity of this alternative been demonſtrated? Permit us to call the courſe of nature the agency of an intelligent Being, and is there any good reaſon for judging this ſtate of the caſe to be probable? Ought we not rather to expect, that ſuch a Being, upon occaſions of peculiar importance, may interrupt the order which he had appointed, yet, that ſuch occaſions ſhould return ſeldom; that theſe interruptions conſequently ſhould be confined to the experience of a few; that the want of it, therefore, in many, ſhould be matter neither of ſurpriſe nor objection?

But as a continuation of the argument from experience it is ſaid, that, when we advance accounts of miracles, we aſſign effects without cauſes, or we attribute effects to cauſes inadequate to the purpoſe, or to cauſes of the operation of which we have no experience. Of what cauſes, we may aſk, and of what effects does the objection ſpeak? If it be anſwered that, when we aſcribe the

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cure of the palſy to a touch, of blindneſs to the anointing of the eyes with clay, or the raiſing of the dead to a word, we lay ourſelves open to this imputation; we reply, that we aſcribe no ſuch effects to ſuch cauſes. We perceive no virtue or energy in theſe things more than in other things of the ſame kind. They are merely ſigns to connect the miracle with its end. The effect we aſcribe ſimply to the volition of the Deity; of whoſe exiſtence and power, not to ſay of whoſe preſence and agency, we have previous and independent proof. We have therefore all we ſeek for in the works of rational agents, a ſufficient power and an adequate motive. In a word, once believe that there is a God, and miracles are not incredible.

Mr. Hume ſtates the caſe of miracles to be a conteſt of oppoſite improbabilities, that is to ſay, a queſtion whether it be more improbable that the miracle ſhould be true, or the teſtimony falſe; and this I think a fair account of the controverſy. But herein I remark a want of argumentative juſtice, that,

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in deſcribing the improbability of miracles, he ſuppreſſes all thoſe circumſtances of extenuation, which reſult from our knowledge of the exiſtence, power, and diſpoſition of the Deity, his concern in the creation, the end anſwered by the miracle, the importance of that end, and its ſubſerviency to the plan purſued in the work of nature. As Mr. Hume has repreſented the queſtion, miracles are alike incredible to him who is previouſly aſſured of the conſtant agency of a divine Being, and to him who believes that no ſuch being exiſts in the univerſe. They are equally incredible, whether related to have been wrought upon occaſions the moſt deſerving, and for purpoſes the moſt beneficial, or for no aſſignable end whatever, or for an end confeſſedly trifling or pernicious. This ſurely cannot be a correct ſtatement. In adjuſting alſo the other ſide of the balance, the ſtrength and weight of teſtimony, this author has provided an anſwer to every poſſible accumulation of hiſtorical proof by telling us, that we are not obliged to explain how the ſtory or the evidence

aroſe,

aroſe. Now I think that we *are* obliged; not, perhaps, to ſhew by poſitive accounts how it did, but by a probable hypotheſis how it might ſo happen. The exiſtence of the teſtimony is a phenomenon. The truth of the fact ſolves the phenomenon. If we reject this ſolution, we ought to have ſome other to reſt in; and none even by our adverſaries can be admitted, which is not conſiſtent with the principles that regulate human affairs and human conduct at preſent, or which makes men *then* to have been a different kind of beings from what they are now.

But the ſhort conſideration which, independently of every other, convinces me that there is no ſolid foundation in Mr. Hume's concluſion is the following. When a theorem is propoſed to a mathematician, the firſt thing he does with it is to try it upon a ſimple caſe; and, if it produce a falſe reſult, he is ſure that there muſt be ſome miſtake in the demonſtration. Now to proceed in this way with what may be called Mr. Hume's

Hume's theorem. If twelve men, whoſe probity and good ſenſe I had long known, ſhould ſeriouſly and circumſtantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impoſſible that they ſhould be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, ſhould call theſe men into his preſence, and offer them a ſhort propoſal, either to confeſs the impoſture, or ſubmit to be tied up to a gibbet; if they ſhould refuſe with one voice to acknowledge that there exiſted any falſehood or impoſture in the caſe; if this threat were communicated to them ſeparately, yet with no different effect; if it was at laſt executed; if I myſelf ſaw them, one after another, conſenting to be racked, burnt, or ſtrangled, rather than give up the truth of their account; ſtill, if Mr. Hume's rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now, I undertake to ſay that there exiſts not a ſceptic in the world who would not believe them; or who would defend ſuch incredulity.

Inſtances

Inſtances of ſpurious miracles ſupported by ſtrong apparent teſtimony undoubtedly demand examination. Mr. Hume has endeavoured to fortify his argument by ſome examples of this kind. I hope in a proper place to ſhew that none of them reach the ſtrength or circumſtances of the Chriſtian evidence. In theſe, however, conſiſts the weight of his objection. In the principle itſelf I am perſuaded there is none.

PART I.

OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WHEREIN IT IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEDGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES.

THE two propoſitions which I ſhall endeavour to eſtabliſh are theſe:

I. That there is ſatisfactory evidence that many, profeſſing to be original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted from the ſame motive to new rules of conduct.

II. That there is *not* ſatisfactory evidence that perſons profeſſing to be original witneſſes of other miracles, in their nature as certain as theſe are, have ever acted in the ſame manner, in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and properly in conſequence of their belief of thoſe accounts.

The firſt of theſe propoſitions, as it forms the argument, will ſtand at the head of the following *nine* chapters.

CHAP.

CHAP. I.

There is ſatisfactory evidence that many, profeſſing to be original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted from the ſame motives to new rules of conduct.

TO ſupport this propoſition, two points are neceſſary to be made out: firſt, that the founder of the inſtitution, his aſſociates and immediate followers, acted the part which the propoſition imputes to them: ſecondly, that they did ſo in atteſtation of the miraculous hiſtory recorded in our ſcriptures, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of this hiſtory.

Before we produce any particular teſti-

mony to the activity and ſufferings which compoſe the ſubject of our firſt aſſertion, it will be proper to conſider the degree of probability which the aſſertion derives from the *nature of the caſe*, that is, by inferences from thoſe parts of the caſe which, in point of fact, are on all hands acknowledged.

Firſt then, the Chriſtian religion exiſts, and therefore by ſome means or other was eſtabliſhed. Now it either owes the principle of its eſtabliſhment, *i. e.* its firſt publication, to the activity of the perſon who was the founder of the inſtitution, and of thoſe who were joined with him in the undertaking, or we are driven upon the ſtrange ſuppoſition, that, although they might lie by, others would take it up; although they were quiet and ſilent, other perſons buſied themſelves in the ſucceſs and propagation of their ſtory. This is perfectly incredible. To me it appears little leſs than certain, that, if the firſt announcing of the religion by the founder had not been followed up by the zeal and induſtry of his immediate diſciples, the

the attempt muſt have expired in its birth. Then as to the kind and degree of exertion which was employed, and the mode of life to which theſe perſons ſubmitted, we reaſonably ſuppoſe it to be like that, which we obſerve in all others who voluntarily become miſſionaries of a new faith. Frequent, earneſt and laborious preaching, conſtantly converſing with religious perſons upon religion, a ſequeſtration from the common pleaſures, engagements and varieties of life, and an addiction to one ſerious object, compoſe the habits of ſuch men. I do not ſay that this mode of life is without enjoyment, but I ſay that the enjoyment ſprings from ſincerity. With a conſciouſneſs at the bottom of hollowneſs and falſehood, the fatigue and reſtraint would become inſupportable. I am apt to believe that very few hypocrites engage in theſe undertakings; or, however, perſiſt in them long. Ordinarily ſpeaking, nothing can overcome the indolence of mankind, the love which is natural to moſt tempers of cheerful ſociety and cheerful ſcenes, or the deſire, which is

common to all, of perſonal eaſe and freedom, but conviction.

Secondly, it is alſo highly probable, from the nature of the caſe, that the propagation of the new religion was attended with difficulty and danger. As addreſſed to the Jews, it was a ſyſtem adverſe not only to their habitual opinions, but to thoſe opinions upon which their hopes, their partialities, their pride, their conſolation was founded. This people, with or without reaſon, had worked themſelves into a perſuaſion, that ſome ſignal and greatly advantageous change was to be effected in the condition of their country, by the agency of a long-promiſed meſſenger from heaven *. The rulers of the Jews, their leading ſect, their

* " Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus et conſtans opinio, eſſe in fatis, ut eo tempore Judæâ profecti rerum potirentur." Sueton. Veſpaſian. cap. 4—8.

" Pluribus perſuaſio inerat, antiquis ſacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipſo tempore fore, ut valeſceret oriens, profectique Judæâ rerum potirentur." Tacit. Hiſt. lib. v. cap. 9—13.

prieſthood had been the authors of this perſuaſion to the common people. So that it was not merely the conjecture of theoretical divines, or the ſecret expectation of a few recluſe devotees, but it was become the popular hope and paſſion, and, like all popular opinions, undoubting, and impatient of contradiction. They clung to this hope under every misfortune of their country, and with more tenacity as their dangers or calamities increaſed. To find therefore that expectations ſo gratifying were to be worſe than diſappointed; that they were to end in the diffuſion of a mild unambitious religion, which, inſtead of victories and triumphs, inſtead of exalting their nation and inſtitution above the reſt of the world, was to advance thoſe whom they deſpiſed to an equality with themſelves, in thoſe very points of compariſon in which they moſt valued their own diſtinction, could be no very pleaſing diſcovery to a Jewiſh mind; nor could the meſſengers of ſuch intelligence expect to be well received or eaſily credited. The doctrine was equally harſh and novel.

The extending of the kingdom of God to thoſe who did not conform to the law of Moſes, was a notion that had never before entered into the thoughts of a Jew.

The character of the new inſtitution was, in other reſpects alſo, ungrateful to Jewiſh habits and principles. Their own religion was in a high degree technical. Even the enlightened Jew placed a great deal of ſtreſs upon the ceremonies of his law, ſaw in them a great deal of virtue and efficacy; the groſs and vulgar had ſcarcely any thing elſe; and the hypocritical and oſtentatious magnified them above meaſure, as being the inſtruments of their own reputation and influence. The Chriſtian ſcheme, without formally repealing the Levitical code, lowered its eſtimation extremely. In the place of ſtrictneſs and zeal in performing the obſervances which that code preſcribed, or which tradition had added to it, the new ſect preached up faith, well-regulated affections, inward purity and moral rectitude of diſpoſition, as the true ground, on the part of the worſhipper,

worſhipper, of merit and acceptance with God. This, however rational it may appear, or recommending to us at preſent, did not by any means facilitate the plan then. On the contrary, to diſparage thoſe qualities which the higheſt characters in the country valued themſelves moſt upon, was a ſure way of making powerful enemies. As if the fruſtration of the national hope was not enough, the long-eſteemed merit of ritual zeal and punctuality was to be decried, and that by Jews preaching to Jews.

The ruling party at Jeruſalem had juſt before crucified the founder of the religion. That is a fact which will not be diſputed. They therefore who ſtood forth to preach the religion, muſt neceſſarily reproach theſe rulers with an execution, which they could not but repreſent as an unjuſt and cruel murder. This would not render their office more eaſy, or their ſituation more ſafe.

With regard to the interference of the Roman

Roman government which was then eſtabliſhed in Judea, I ſhould not expect, that, deſpiſing, as it did, the religion of the country, it would, if left to itſelf, animadvert, either with much vigilance, or much ſeverity, upon the ſchiſms and controverſies which aroſe within it. Yet there was that in Chriſtianity which might eaſily afford a handle of accuſation with a jealous government. The Chriſtians avowed an unqualified obedience to a new maſter. They avowed alſo that he was the perſon who had been foretold to the Jews under the ſuſpected title of King. The ſpiritual nature of this kingdom, the conſiſtency of this obedience with civil ſubjection, were diſtinctions too refined to be entertained by a Roman preſident, who viewed the buſineſs at a great diſtance, or through the medium of very hoſtile repreſentations. Our hiſtories accordingly inform us, that this was the turn which the enemies of Jeſus gave to his character and pretenſions in their remonſtrances with Pontius Pilate. And Juſtin Martyr, about a hundred years afterwards, complains that

that the ſame miſtake prevailed in his time; "ye having heard that we are waiting for a kingdom, ſuppoſe, without diſtinguiſhing, that we mean a human kingdom, when in truth we ſpeak of that which is with God*." And it was undoubtedly a natural ſource of calumny and miſconſtruction.

The preachers therefore of Chriſtianity had to contend with prejudice backed by power. They had to come forward to a diſappointed people, to a prieſthood poſſeſſing a conſiderable ſhare of municipal authority, and actuated by ſtrong motives of oppoſition and reſentment; and they had to do this under a foreign government, to whoſe favour they made no pretenſions, and which was conſtantly ſurrounded by their enemies. The well known, becauſe the experienced, fate of reformers, whenever the reformation ſubverts ſome reigning opinion, and does not proceed upon a change already taken place in the ſentiments of a country, will not al-

* Ap. 1me. p. 16, ed. Thirl.

low,

low, much leſs lead us, to ſuppoſe, that the firſt propagators of Chriſtianity at Jeruſalem and in Judea, with the difficulties and the enemies which they had to contend with, and entirely deſtitute, as they were, of force, authority or protection, could execute their miſſion with perſonal eaſe and ſafety.

Let us next enquire what might reaſonably be expected by the preachers of Chriſtianity when they turned themſelves to the heathen public. Now the firſt thing that ſtrikes us is, that the religion they carried with them was *excluſive*. It denied without reſerve the truth of every article of heathen mythology, the exiſtence of every object of their worſhip. It accepted no compromiſe: it admitted no comprehenſion. It muſt prevail, if it prevailed at all, by the overthrow of every ſtatue, altar and temple, in the world. It will not eaſily be credited that a deſign, ſo bold as this was, could in any age be attempted to be carried into execution with impunity.

For

For it ought to be conſidered, that this was not ſetting forth, or magnifying the character and worſhip of ſome new competitor for a place in the Pantheon, whoſe pretenſions might be diſcuſſed or aſſerted without queſtioning the reality of any others. It was pronouncing all other gods to be falſe, and all other worſhip vain. From the facility with which the Polytheiſm of ancient nations admitted new objects of worſhip into the number of their acknowledged divinities, or the patience with which they might entertain propoſals of this kind, we can argue nothing as to their toleration of a ſyſtem, or of the publiſhers and active propagators of a ſyſtem, which ſwept away the very foundation of the exiſting eſtabliſhment. The one was nothing more than what it would be, in Popiſh countries, to add a ſaint to the calendar; the other was to aboliſh and tread under foot the calendar itſelf.

Secondly, it ought alſo to be conſidered, that this was not the caſe of philoſophers pro-

propounding in their books, or in their ſchools, doubts concerning the truth of the popular creed, or even avowing their diſbelief of it. Theſe philoſophers did not go about from place to place to collect proſelytes from amongſt the common people; to form in the heart of the country ſocieties profeſſing their tenets; to provide for the order, inſtruction and permanency of theſe ſocieties; nor did they enjoin their followers to withdraw themſelves from the public worſhip of the temples, or refuſe a compliance with rites inſtituted by the laws*. Theſe things are what the Chriſtians did, and what the philoſophers did not: and in theſe conſiſted the activity and danger of the enterpriſe.

Thirdly, it ought alſo to be conſidered,

* The beſt of the ancient philoſophers, Plato, Cicero, and Epictetus, allowed, or rather enjoined, men to worſhip the gods of the country, and in the eſtabliſhed form. See paſſages to this purpoſe, collected from their works by Dr. Clarke, Nat. and Rev. Rel. p. 180, ed. v. Except Socrates, they all thought it wiſer to comply with the laws than to contend.

that

that this danger proceeded not merely from ſolemn acts and public reſolutions of the ſtate, but from ſudden burſts of violence at particular places, from the licence of the populace, the raſhneſs of ſome magiſtrates and the negligence of others; from the influence and inſtigation of intereſted adverſaries, and, in general, from the variety and warmth of opinion which an errand ſo novel and extraordinary could not fail of exciting. I can conceive that the teachers of Chriſtianity might both fear and ſuffer much from theſe cauſes, without any general perſecution being denounced againſt them by imperial authority. Some length of time, I ſhould ſuppoſe, might paſs, before the vaſt machine of the Roman empire would be put in motion, or its attention be obtained to religious controverſy: but, during that time, a great deal of ill uſage might be endured, by a ſet of friendleſs, unprotected travellers, telling men, wherever they came, that the religion of their anceſtors, the religion in which they had been brought up, the religion of

the

the ſtate and of the magiſtrate, the rites which they frequented, the pomp which they admired, was throughout a ſyſtem of folly and deluſion.

Nor do I think that the teachers of Chriſtianity would find protection in that general diſbelief of the popular theology, which is ſuppoſed to have prevailed amongſt the intelligent part of the heathen public. It is by no means true that unbelievers are uſually tolerant. They are not diſpoſed (and why ſhould they?) to endanger the preſent ſtate of things, by ſuffering a religion of which they believe nothing, to be diſturbed by another of which they believe as little. They are ready themſelves to conform to any thing; and are, oftentimes, amongſt the foremoſt to procure conformity from others, by any method which they think likely to be efficacious. When was ever a change of religion patronized by infidels? How little, notwithſtanding the reigning ſcepticiſm, and the magnified liberality of that age, the true

principles of toleration were underſtood by the wiſeſt men amongſt them, may be gathered from two eminent and unconteſted examples. The younger Pliny, poliſhed, as he was, by all the literature of that ſoft and elegant period, could gravely pronounce this monſtrous judgment: "Thoſe who perſiſted in declaring themſelves Chriſtians, I ordered to be led away to puniſhment (*i. e.* to execution), for I DID NOT DOUBT, *whatever it was that they confeſſed, that contumacy and inflexible obſtinacy ought to be puniſhed.*" His maſter, Trajan, a mild and accompliſhed prince, went, nevertheleſs, no farther in his ſentiments of moderation and equity, than what appears in the following reſcript: "The Chriſtians are not to be ſought for; but if any are brought before you, and convicted, they are to be puniſhed." And this direction he gives, after it had been reported to him by his own preſident, that, by the moſt ſtrict examination, nothing could be diſcovered in the principles of theſe perſons, but "a bad and exceſſive ſuperſtition," accompanied, it ſeems, with an oath

or mutual federation, " to allow themſelves in no crime or immoral conduct whatever." The truth is, the ancient heathens conſidered religion entirely as an affair of ſtate, as much under the tuition of the magiſtrate as any other part of the police. The religion of that age was not merely allied to the ſtate: it was incorporated into it. Many of its offices were adminiſtered by the magiſtrate. Its titles of pontiffs, augurs, and flamens, were borne by ſenators, conſuls and generals. Without diſcuſſing therefore the truth of the theology, they reſented every affront put upon the eſtabliſhed worſhip, as a direct oppoſition to the authority of government.

Add to which, that the religious ſyſtems of thoſe times, however ill ſupported by evidence, had been long eſtabliſhed. The *ancient* religion of a country has always many votaries, and ſometimes not the fewer becauſe its origin is hidden in remoteneſs and obſcurity. Men have a natural veneration for antiquity, eſpecially in matters of religion.

religion. What Tacitus ſays of the Jewiſh, was more applicable to the heathen eſtabliſhment, "Hi ritus, quoquo modo inducti, antiquitate defenduntur." It was alſo a ſplendid and ſumptuous worſhip. It had its prieſthood, its endowments, its temples. Statuary, painting, architecture, and muſic, contributed their effect to its ornament and magnificence. It abounded in feſtival ſhows and ſolemnities, to which the common people are greatly addicted; and which were of a nature to engage them much more than any thing of that ſort among us. Theſe things would retain great numbers on its ſide by the faſcination of ſpectacle and pomp, as well as intereſt many in its preſervation by the advantage which they drew from it. "It was moreover interwoven," as Mr. Gibbon rightly repreſents it, "with every circumſtance of buſineſs or pleaſure, of public or private life, with all the offices and amuſements of ſociety." Upon the due celebration alſo of its rites, the people were taught to believe, and did believe, that the proſperity

of their country in a great meaſure depended.

I am willing to accept the account of the matter which is given by Mr. Gibbon: "The various modes of worſhip which prevailed in the Roman world, were all conſidered by the people as equally true, by the philoſophers as equally falſe, and by the magiſtrate as equally uſeful:" and I would aſk, from which of theſe three claſſes of men were the Chriſtian miſſionaries to look for protection or impunity? Could they expect it from the people, "whoſe acknowledged confidence in the public religion" they ſubverted from its foundation? from the philoſopher, who, "conſidering all religions as equally falſe," would of courſe rank theirs among the number, with the addition of regarding them as buſy and troubleſome zealots? or from the magiſtrate, who, ſatisfied with the "utility" of the ſubſiſting religion, would not be likely to countenance a ſpirit of proſelytiſm and innovation; a ſyſtem, which declared war againſt every

every other, and which, if it prevailed, muſt end in a total rupture of public opinion; an upſtart religion, in a word, which was not content with its own authority, but muſt diſgrace all the ſettled religions of the world? It was not to be imagined that he would endure with patience, that the religion of the emperor and of the ſtate ſhould be calumniated and borne down by a company of ſuperſtitious and deſpicable Jews.

Laſtly; the *nature of the caſe affords* a ſtrong proof, that the original teachers of Chriſtianity, in conſequence of their new profeſſion, entered upon a new and ſingular courſe of life. We may be allowed to preſume, that the inſtitution which they preached to others, they conformed to in their own perſons; becauſe this is no more than what every teacher of a new religion both does, and muſt do, in order to obtain either proſelytes or hearers. The change which this would produce was very conſiderable. It is a change which we do not eaſily eſtimate, becauſe, ourſelves and all about us

being habituated to the inſtitution from our infancy, it is what we neither experience nor obſerve. After men became Chriſtians, much of their time was ſpent in prayer and devotion, in religious meetings, in celebrating the euchariſt, in conferences, in exhortations, in preaching, in an affectionate intercourſe with one another, and correſpondence with other ſocieties. Perhaps their mode of life in its form and habit was not very unlike the Unitas Fratrum, or of modern Methodiſts. Think then what it was to become *ſuch* at Corinth, at Epheſus, at Antioch, or even at Jeruſalem. How new! how aliene from all their former habits and ideas, and from thoſe of every body about them! What a revolution there muſt have been of opinions and prejudices to bring the matter to this!

We know what the precepts of the religion are; how pure, how benevolent, how diſintereſted a conduct they enjoin; and that this purity and benevolence is extended to the very thoughts and affections. We

are not perhaps at liberty to take for granted, that the lives of the preachers of Chriſtianity were as perfect as their leſſons: but we are entitled to contend, that the obſervable part of their behaviour muſt have agreed in a great meaſure with the duties which they taught. There was therefore, which is all that we aſſert, a courſe of life purſued by them, different from that which they before led. And this is of great importance. Men are brought to any thing almoſt ſooner than to change their habit of life, eſpecially, when the change is either inconvenient, or made againſt the force of natural inclination, or with the loſs of accuſtomed indulgences. "It is the moſt difficult of all things to convert men from vicious habits to virtuous ones, as every one may judge from what he feels in himſelf, as well as from what he ſees in others *." It is almoſt like making men over again.

Left then to myſelf, and without any

* Hartley's Eſſays on Man, p. 190.

more information than a knowledge of the exiſtence of the religion, of the general ſtory upon which it is founded, and that no act of power, force, or authority, was concerned in its firſt ſucceſs, I ſhould conclude, from the very nature and exigency of the caſe, that the author of the religion during his life, and his immediate diſciples after his death, *exerted* themſelves in ſpreading and publiſhing the inſtitution throughout the country in which it began, and into which it was firſt carried; that, in the proſecution of this purpoſe, they underwent the labours and troubles, which we obſerve the propagators of new ſects to undergo: that the attempt muſt neceſſarily have alſo been in a high degree dangerous; that from the ſubject of the miſſion, compared with the fixed opinions and prejudices of thoſe to whom the miſſionaries were to addreſs themſelves, they could hardly fail of encountering ſtrong and frequent oppoſition; that, by the hand of government, as well as from the ſudden fury and unbridled licence of the people, they would oftentimes experience injurious

and

and cruel treatment; that, at any rate, they muſt have always had ſo much to fear for their perſonal ſafety, as to have paſſed their lives in a ſtate of conſtant peril and anxiety; and laſtly, that their mode of life and conduct, viſibly at leaſt, correſponded with the inſtitution which they delivered, and, ſo far, was both new, and required continual ſelf-denial.

CHAP. II.

There is ſatisfactory evidence, that many, profeſſing to be original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted from the ſame motive to new rules of conduct.

AFTER thus conſidering what was *likely* to happen, we are next to enquire how the tranſaction is repreſented in the ſeveral accounts that have come down to us. And this enquiry is properly preceded by the other, for as much as the reception of theſe accounts may depend in part upon the credibility of what they contain.

The obſcure and diſtant view of Chriſtianity,

anity, which ſome of the heathen writers of that age had gained, and which a few paſſages in their remaining works incidentally diſcover to us, offers itſelf to our notice in the firſt place: becauſe, ſo far as this evidence goes, it is the conceſſion of adverſaries; the ſource from which it is drawn is unſuſpected. Under this head a quotation from Tacitus, well known to every ſcholar, muſt be inſerted as deſerving of particular attention. The reader will bear in mind that this paſſage was written about ſeventy years after Chriſt's death, and that it relates to tranſactions which took place about thirty years after that event. Speaking of the fire which happened at Rome in the time of Nero, and of the ſuſpicions which were entertained that the emperor himſelf was concerned in cauſing it, the hiſtorian proceeds in his narrative and obſervations thus:

" But neither theſe exertions, nor his largeſſes to the people, nor his offerings to the gods, did away the infamous imputation under

under which Nero lay of having ordered the city to be ſet on fire. To put an end therefore to this report, he laid the guilt, and inflicted the moſt cruel puniſhments, upon a ſet of people, who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and called by the vulgar *Chriſtians*. The founder of that name was Chriſt, who ſuffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator Pontius Pilate.—This pernicious ſuperſtition, thus checked for a while, broke out again; and ſpread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome alſo, whither every thing bad upon earth finds its way, and is practiſed. Some who confeſſed their ſect were firſt ſeized, and afterwards by their information a vaſt multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not ſo much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their ſufferings at their execution were aggravated by inſult and mockery; for ſome were diſguiſed in the ſkins of wild beaſts, and worried to death by dogs—ſome were crucified—and others

were

were wrapt in pitched ſhirts*, and ſet on fire when the day cloſed, that they might ſerve as lights to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for theſe executions; and exhibited at the ſame time a mock Circenſian entertainment, being a ſpectator of the whole in the dreſs of a charioteer, ſometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and ſometimes viewing the ſpectacles from his car. This conduct made the ſufferers pitied; and though they were criminals, and deſerving the ſevereſt puniſhment, yet they were conſidered as ſacrificed, not ſo much out of a regard to the public good, as to gratify the cruelty of one man."

Our concern with this paſſage at preſent is only ſo far as it affords a preſumption in ſupport of the propoſition which we maintain, concerning the activity and ſufferings

* This is rather a paraphraſe, but is juſtified by what the Scholiaſt upon Juvenal ſays—" Nero maleficos homines tedâ et papyro et cerâ ſuperveſtiebat, et ſic ad ignem admoveri jubebat." Lard. Jewiſh and Heath. Teſt. vol. i. p. 359.

of

of the firſt teachers of Chriſtianity. Now, conſidered in this view, it proves three things: 1ſt, that the founder of the inſtitution was put to death; 2dly, that in the ſame country in which he was put to death, the religion, after a ſhort check, broke out again and ſpread; 3dly, that it ſo ſpread, as that, within thirty-four years from the author's death, a very great number of Chriſtians (ingens eorum multitudo) were found at Rome. From which fact, the two following inferences may be fairly drawn: firſt, that, if, in the ſpace of thirty-four years from its commencement, the religion had ſpread throughout Judea, had extended itſelf to Rome, and there had numbered a great multitude of converts, the original teachers and miſſionaries of the inſtitution could not have been *idle*; ſecondly, that when the author of the undertaking was put to death as a malefactor for his attempt, the endeavours of his followers to eſtabliſh his religion, in the ſame country, amongſt the ſame people, and in the ſame age, could not but be attended with danger.

Suetonius,

Suetonius, a writer contemporary with Tacitus, deſcribing the tranſactions of the ſame reign, uſes theſe words, "Affecti ſuppliciis Chriſtiani, genus hominum ſuperſtitionis novæ et maleficæ*. The Chriſtians, a ſet of men, of a new and miſchievous (or magical) ſuperſtition, were puniſhed."

Since it is not mentioned *here* that the burning of the city was the pretence of the puniſhment of the Chriſtians, or that they were the Chriſtians of Rome who alone ſuffered, it is probable that Suetonius refers to ſome more general perſecution than the ſhort and occaſional one which Tacitus deſcribes.

Juvenal, a writer of the ſame age with the two former, and intending, as it ſhould ſeem, to commemorate the cruelties exerciſed under Nero's government, has the following lines †:

* Suet. Nero. cap. 16.

† Sat. 1, ver. 155.

"Pone

" Pone Tigellinum, tedâ lucebis in illâ,
Quâ ſtantes ardent, qui fixo gutture fumant;
Et latum mediâ ſulcum deducit * arenâ."

" Deſcribe Tigellinus (a creature of Nero's), and you ſhall ſuffer the ſame puniſhment with thoſe who ſtand burning in their own flame and ſmoke, their head being held up by a ſtake fixed to their chin, till they make a long ſtream of blood and melted ſulphur on the ground."

If this paſſage were conſidered by itſelf, the ſubject of the alluſion might be doubtful; but when connected with the teſtimony of Suetonius, as to the actual puniſhment of the Chriſtians by Nero; and with the account given by Tacitus of the *ſpecies* of puniſhment which they were made to undergo; I think it ſufficiently probable, that theſe were the executions to which the poet refers.

Theſe things, as hath already been ob-

* Forſan " deducis."

 ſerved,

ſerved, took place within thirty-one years after Chriſt's death, that is, according to the courſe of nature, in the life-time, probably, of ſome of the apoſtles, and certainly in the life-time of thoſe who were converted by the apoſtles, or who were converted in their time. If then the founder of the religion was put to death in the execution of his deſign; if the firſt race of converts to the religion, many of them, ſuffered the greateſt extremities for their profeſſion; it is hardly credible, that thoſe who came *between* the two, who were companions of the author of the inſtitution during his life, and the teachers and propagators of the inſtitution after his death, could go about their undertaking with eaſe and ſafety.

The teſtimony of the younger Pliny belongs to a later period; for although he was contemporary with Tacitus and Suetonius, yet his account does not, like theirs, go back to the tranſactions of Nero's reign, but is confined to the affairs of his own time. His celebrated letter to Trajan was written

about ſeventy years after Chriſt's death; and the information to be drawn from it, ſo far as it is connected with our argument, relates principally to two points: firſt, to the *number* of Chriſtians in Bithynia and Pontus, which was ſo conſiderable as to induce the governor of theſe provinces to ſpeak of them in the following terms, "Multi, omnis ætatis, utriuſque ſexûs etiam —neque enim civitates tantum, ſed vicos etiam et agros, ſuperſtitionis iſtius contagio pervagata eſt." "There are many of every age and of both ſexes—nor has the contagion of this ſuperſtition ſeized cities only, but ſmaller towns alſo, and the open country." Great exertions muſt have been uſed by the preachers of Chriſtianity to produce this ſtate of things within this time. Secondly, to a point which hath been already noticed, and which I think of importance to be obſerved, namely, the ſufferings to which Chriſtians were expoſed, *without* any public perſecution being denounced againſt them by ſovereign authority. For, from Pliny's doubt how he was to act, his ſilence concerning

concerning any ſubſiſting law upon the ſubject, his requeſting the emperor's reſcript, and the emperor, agreeably to his requeſt, propounding a rule for his direction, without reference to any prior rule, it may be inferred, that there was, at that time, no public edict againſt the Chriſtians in force. Yet from this ſame epiſtle of Pliny it appears "that accuſations, trials, and examinations were, and had been, going on againſt them, in the provinces over which he preſided; that ſchedules were delivered by anonymous informers, containing the names of perſons who were ſuſpected of holding or of favouring the religion; that, in conſequence of theſe informations, many had been apprehended, of whom ſome boldly avowed their profeſſion, and died in the cauſe; others denied that they were Chriſtians; others, acknowledging that they had once been Chriſtians, declared that they had long ceaſed to be ſuch." All which demonſtrates, that the profeſſion of Chriſtianity was at that time (in that country at leaſt) attended with fear and danger: and yet this

took place without any edict from the Roman ſovereign, commanding or authorizing the perſecution of Chriſtians. This obſervation is farther confirmed by a reſcript of Adrian to Minucius Fundanus, the proconſul of Aſia*: from which reſcript it appears that the cuſtom of the people of Aſia was to proceed againſt the Chriſtians with tumult and uproar. This diſorderly practice, I ſay, is recognized in the edict, becauſe the emperor enjoins, that, for the future, if the Chriſtians were guilty they ſhould be legally brought to trial, and not be purſued by importunity and clamour.

Martial wrote a few years before the younger Pliny; and, as his manner was, made the ſufferings of the Chriſtians the ſubject of his ridicule †. Nothing however could

* Lard. Heath. Teſt. v. ii. p. 110.

† In matutinâ nuper ſpectatus arenâ
Mucius, impoſuit qui ſua membra focis,
Si patiens fortiſque tibi duruſque videtur,
Abderitanæ pectora plebis habes;

Nam

could ſhew the notoriety of the fact with more certainty than this does. Martial's teſtimony, as well indeed as Pliny's, goes alſo to another point, viz. that the deaths of theſe men were martyrdoms in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, that is to ſay, were ſo voluntary, that it was in their power, at the time of pronouncing the ſentence, to have averted the execution, by conſenting to join in heathen ſacrifices.

The conſtancy, and by conſequence the ſufferings, of the Chriſtians of this period, is alſo referred to by Epictetus, who imputes their intrepidity to madneſs, or to a kind of faſhion or habit; and about fifty years afterwards, by Marcus Aurelius, who aſcribes it to obſtinacy. "Is it poſſible (Epictetus aſks) that a man may arrive at this temper, and become indifferent to thoſe things, from

Nam cum dicatur tunicâ præſente moleſtâ,
Ure * manum, plus eſt dicere, non facio.

* Forſan "thure manum."

madneſs or from habit, *as the Galileans* * ?"
" Let this preparation of the mind (to die) ariſe from its own judgment, and not from obſtinacy *like the Chriſtians* †."

* Epic. l. iv. c. 7.
† Marc. Aur. Med. l. xi, c. 3.

CHAP. III.

There is ſatisfactory evidence, that many, profeſſing to be original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted from the ſame motive to new rules of conduct.

OF the primitive condition of Chriſtianity, a diſtant only and general view can be acquired from heathen writers. It is in our own books that the detail and interior of the tranſaction muſt be ſought for. And this is nothing different from what might be expected. Who would write a hiſtory of Chriſtianity but a Chriſtian? Who was likely to record the travels, ſufferings, labours, or ſucceſſes of the Apoſtles, but one of their own number, or of their followers?

Now theſe books come up in their accounts to the full extent of the propoſition which we maintain. We have four hiſtories of Jeſus Chriſt. We have a hiſtory taking up the narrative from his death, and carrying on an account of the propagation of the religion, and of ſome of the moſt eminent perſons engaged in it, for a ſpace of nearly thirty years. We have, what ſome may think ſtill more original, a collection of letters, written by certain principal agents in the buſineſs, upon the buſineſs, and in the midſt of their concern and connection with it. And we have theſe writings ſeverally atteſting the point which we contend for, viz. the ſufferings of the witneſſes of the hiſtory, and atteſting it in every variety of form in which it can be conceived to appear; directly and indirectly, expreſsly and incidentally, by aſſertion, recital, and alluſion, by narratives of facts, and by arguments and diſcourſes built upon theſe facts, either referring to them, or neceſſarily preſuppoſing them.

I remark this variety, becauſe in examining

ing ancient records, or indeed any ſpecies of teſtimony, it is, in my opinion, of the greateſt importance to attend to the information or grounds of argument which are *caſually* and *undeſignedly* diſcloſed; foraſmuch as this ſpecies of proof is, of all others, the leaſt liable to be corrupted by fraud or miſrepreſentation.

I may be allowed therefore, in the enquiry which is now before us, to ſuggeſt ſome concluſions of this ſort, as preparatory to more direct teſtimony.

1. Our books relate, that Jeſus Chriſt, the founder of the religion, was, in conſequence of his undertaking, put to death, as a malefactor, at Jeruſalem. This point at leaſt will be granted, becauſe it is no more than what Tacitus has recorded. They then proceed to tell us, that the religion was, *notwithſtanding*, ſet forth at this ſame city of Jeruſalem, propagated from thence throughout Judea, and afterwards preached in other parts of the Roman empire. Theſe points alſo

are

are fully confirmed by Tacitus, who informs us that the religion, after a ſhort check, broke out again in the country where it took its riſe; that it not only ſpread throughout Judea, but had reached Rome; and that it had there great multitudes of converts: and all this within thirty years after its commencement. Now theſe facts afford a ſtrong inference in behalf of the propoſition which we maintain. What could the diſciples of Chriſt expect for themſelves when they ſaw their maſter put to death? Could they hope to eſcape the dangers, in which he had periſhed? If they have perſecuted me, they will alſo perſecute you, was the warning of common ſenſe. With this example before their eyes, they could not be without a full ſenſe of the peril of their future enterpriſe.

2. Secondly, all the hiſtories agree in repreſenting Chriſt as foretelling the perſecution of his followers.

"Then ſhall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and ſhall kill you, and ye ſhall

be hated of all nations for my name's ſake*."

"When affliction or perſecution ariſeth for the word's ſake, immediately they are offended †."

"They ſhall lay hands on you, and perſecute you, delivering you up to the ſynagogues, and into priſons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's ſake—and ye ſhall be betrayed both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolks and friends, and ſome of you ſhall they cauſe to be put to death ‡."

"The time cometh, that he that killeth you will think that he doeth God ſervice. And theſe things will they do unto you, becauſe they have not known the father nor me. But theſe things have I told you, that when the time ſhall come ye may remember that I told you of them §."

* Mat. xxiv. 9. † Mark iv. 17. See alſo x. 30.
‡ Luke xxi. 12—16. See alſo xi. 49.
§ John xvi. 4. See alſo xv. 20, and xvi. 33.

I am not entitled to argue from theſe paſſages, that Chriſt actually did foretel theſe events, and that they did accordingly come to paſs, becauſe that would be at once to aſſume the truth of the religion: but I am entitled to contend, that one ſide or other of the following disjunction is true; either that the evangeliſts have delivered what Chriſt really ſpoke, and that the event correſponded with the prediction; or that they put the prediction into Chriſt's mouth, becauſe, at the time of writing the hiſtory, the event had turned out ſo to be: for the only two remaining ſuppoſitions appear in the higheſt degree incredible, which are, either that Chriſt filled the minds of his followers with fears and apprehenſions, without any reaſon or authority for what he ſaid, and contrary to the truth of the caſe; or that, although Chriſt had never foretold any ſuch thing, and the event would have contradicted him if he had, yet hiſtorians who lived in the age when the event was known, falſely as well as officiouſly, aſcribed theſe words to him.

3. Thirdly,

3. Thirdly, theſe books abound with exhortations to patience, and with topics of comfort under diſtreſs.

"Who ſhall ſeparate us from the love of Chriſt? Shall tribulation, or diſtreſs, or perſecution, or famine, or nakedneſs, or peril, or ſword? Nay, in all theſe things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us*."

"We are troubled on every ſide, yet not diſtreſſed; we are perplexed, but not in deſpair; perſecuted, but not forſaken; caſt down, but not deſtroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jeſus, that the life alſo of Jeſus might be made manifeſt in our body—knowing that he which raiſed up the Lord Jeſus ſhall raiſe us up alſo by Jeſus, and ſhall preſent us with you—— For which cauſe we faint not; but, though our outward man periſh, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our

* Rom. viii. 35. 37.

light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*."

"Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have ſpoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of ſuffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have ſeen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy†."

"Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly whilſt ye were made a gazing-ſtock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilſt ye became companions of them that were ſo uſed; for ye had compaſſion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the ſpoiling of your goods, knowing in yourſelves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring ſub-

* 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 10. 14. 16, 17.

† James v. 10, 11.

ſtance.

ſtance. Caſt not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompenſe of reward; for ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promiſe*."

"So that we ourſelves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your perſecutions and tribulations that ye endure. Which is a manifeſt token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be accounted worthy of the kingdom for which ye alſo ſuffer †."

"We rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and not only ſo, but we glory in tribulations alſo; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope ‡."

"Beloved, think it not ſtrange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though ſome ſtrange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inaſmuch as ye are

* Heb. x. 32—36. † 2 Theſſ. i. 1—5. ‡ Rom. v. 3, 4.

par-

partakers of Chriſt's ſufferings. Wherefore let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their ſouls to him in well doing as unto a faithful Creator*."

What could all theſe texts mean, if there was nothing in the circumſtances of the times which required patience, which called for the exerciſe of conſtancy and reſolution? or will it be pretended that theſe exhortations (which, let it be obſerved, come not from one author, but from many) were put in, merely to induce a belief in after-ages, that the firſt Chriſtanis were expoſed to dangers which they were not expoſed to, or underwent ſufferings which they did not undergo? If theſe books belong to the age to which they lay claim, and in which age, whether genuine or ſpurious, they certainly did appear, this ſuppoſition cannot be maintained for a moment; becauſe I think it impoſſible to believe, that paſſages, which muſt

* 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13, 19.

be

be deemed not only unintelligible, but falſe, by the perſons into whoſe hands the books upon their publication were to come, ſhould nevertheleſs be inſerted, for the purpoſe of producing an effect upon remote generations. In forgeries which do not appear till many ages after that to which they pretend to belong, it is poſſible that ſome contrivance of that ſort may take place; but in no others can it be attempted.

CHAP. IV.

There is ſatisfactory evidence that many, profeſſing to be original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted from the ſame motives to new rules of conduct.

THE account of the treatment of the religion and of the exertions of its firſt preachers, as ſtated in our ſcriptures (not in a profeſſed hiſtory of perſecutions, or in the connected manner in which I am about to recite it, but diſperſedly and occaſionally, in the courſe of a mixed, general hiſtory, which circumſtance alone negatives the ſuppoſition of any fraudulent deſign), is the following: "That the founder of Chriſtianity, from the commencement of his miniſtry to the time

of his violent death, employed himſelf wholly in publiſhing the inſtitution in Judea and Galilee; that, in order to aſſiſt him in this purpoſe, he made choice, out of the number of his followers, of twelve perſons, who might accompany him as he travelled from place to place; that, except a ſhort abſence upon a journey, in which he ſent them, two by two, to announce his miſſion, and one, of a few days, when they went before him to Jeruſalem, theſe perſons were ſtatedly and conſtantly attending upon him; that they were with him at Jeruſalem when he was apprehended and put to death; and that they were commiſſioned by him, when his own miniſtry was concluded, to publiſh his goſpel, and collect diſciples to it from all countries of the world." The account then proceeds to ſtate, "That, a few days after his departure, theſe perſons, with ſome of his relations, and ſome who had regularly frequented their ſociety, aſſembled at Jeruſalem; that, conſidering the office of preaching the religion as now devolved upon them, and one of their number having deſerted the

cauſe, and, repenting of his perfidy, having deſtroyed himſelf, they proceeded to elect another into his place; and that they were careful to make their election out of the number of thoſe who had accompanied their maſter from the firſt to the laſt, in order, as they alledged, that he might be a witneſs, together with themſelves, of the principal facts which they were about to produce and relate concerning him *; that they began their work at Jeruſalem, by publicly aſſerting, that this Jeſus, whom the rulers and inhabitants of that place had ſo lately crucified, was, in truth, the perſon in whom all their prophecies and long expectations terminated; that he had been ſent amongſt them by God; and that he was appointed by God the future judge of the human ſpecies; that all who were ſolicitous to ſecure to themſelves happineſs after death, ought to receive him as ſuch, and to make profeſſion of their belief, by being baptized in his name †." The hiſtory goes on to relate, " that conſiderable

* Acts i. 21, 22. † Acts xi.

numbers

numbers accepted this propoſal, and that they who did ſo, formed amongſt themſelves a ſtrict union and ſociety*; that, the attention of the Jewiſh government being ſoon drawn upon them, two of the principal perſons of the twelve, and who alſo had lived moſt intimately and conſtantly with the founder of the religion, were ſeized as they were diſcourſing to the people in the temple; that, after being kept all night in priſon, they were brought the next day before an aſſembly, compoſed of the chief perſons of the Jewiſh magiſtracy and prieſthood; that this aſſembly, after ſome conſultation, found nothing, at that time, better to be done towards ſuppreſſing the growth of the ſect, than to threaten their priſoners with puniſhment, if they perſiſted; that theſe men, after expreſſing, in decent but firm language, the obligation under which they conſidered themſelves to be, to declare what they knew, "to ſpeak the things which they had ſeen and heard," returned from the coun-

* Acts v. 41.

cil, and reported what had paſſed to their companions; that this report, whilſt it apprized them of the danger of their ſituation and undertaking, had no other effect upon their conduct, than to produce in them a general reſolution to perſevere, and an earneſt prayer to God to furniſh them with aſſiſtance, and to inſpire them with fortitude, proportioned to the increaſing exigency of the ſervice *." A very ſhort time after this, we read " that all the twelve apoſtles were ſeized and caſt into priſon †; that, being brought a ſecond time before the Jewiſh Sanhedrim, they were upbraided with their diſobedience to the injunction which had been laid upon them, and beaten for their contumacy; that being charged once more to deſiſt, they were ſuffered to depart; that however they neither quitted Jeruſalem, nor ceaſed from preaching, both daily in the temple, and from houſe to houſe ‡; and that the twelve conſidered themſelves as ſo entirely and excluſively devoted to this office, that they now

* Acts iv. † Acts v. 18. ‡ Acts v.

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transferred, what may be called the temporal affairs of the ſociety, to other hands*."

* I do not know that it has ever been inſinuated, that the Chriſtian miſſion, in the hands of the apoſtles, was a ſcheme for making a fortune, or for getting money. But it may nevertheleſs be fit to remark upon this paſſage of their hiſtory, how perfectly free they appear to have been from any pecuniary or intereſted views whatever. The moſt tempting opportunity which occurred, of making a gain of their converts, was by the cuſtody and management of the public funds, when ſome of the richer members, intending to contribute their fortunes to the common ſupport of the ſociety, ſold their poſſeſſions, and laid down the prices at the apoſtles' feet. Yet ſo inſenſible, or undeſirous, were they of the advantage which that confidence afforded, that, we find, they very ſoon diſpoſed of the truſt, by putting it into the hands, not of nominees of their own, but of ſtewards formally elected for the purpoſe by the ſociety at large.

We may add alſo, that this exceſs of generoſity, which caſt private property into the public ſtock, was ſo far from being required by the apoſtles, or impoſed as a law of Chriſtianity, that Peter reminds Ananias that he had been guilty, in his behaviour, of an officious and voluntary prevarication; for whilſt, ſays he, thy eſtate remained unſold, "was it not thine own? and, after it was ſold, was it not in thine own power?"

Hitherto the preachers of the new religion ſeem to have had the common people on their ſide; which is aſſigned as the reaſon why the Jewiſh rulers did not, at this time, think it prudent to proceed to greater extremities. It was not long, however, before the enemies of the inſtitution found means to repreſent it to the people as tending to ſubvert their law, degrade their lawgiver, and diſhonour their temple*. And theſe inſinuations were diſperſed with ſo much ſucceſs, as to induce the people to join with their ſuperiors in the ſtoning of a very active member of the new community.

The death of this man was the ſignal of a general perſecution, the activity of which may be judged of from one anecdote of the time: "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every houſe, and haling men and women, committed them to priſon." This perſecution † raged at Jeruſa-

* Acts vi. 12. † Acts viii. 3.

lem

lem with ſo much fury, as to drive * moſt of the new converts out of the place, except the twelve apoſtles. The converts, thus "ſcattered abroad," preached the religion wherever they came: and their preaching was, in effect, the preaching of the *twelve*; for it was ſo far carried on in concert and correſpondence with *them*, that, when they heard of the ſucceſs of their emiſſaries in a particular country, they ſent two of their number to the place to complete and confirm the miſſion.

An event now took place of great importance in the future hiſtory of the religion. The † perſecution which had begun at Jeruſalem, followed the Chriſtians to other cities, in which the authority of the Jewiſh

* Acts viii. 1. "And they were *all* ſcattered abroad;" but the term "all" is not, I think, to be taken ſtrictly, or as denoting more than the *generality*; in like manner as in Acts ix. 35. "And *all* that dwelt at Lydda and Saron ſaw him, and turned to the Lord."

† Acts ix.

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Sanhedrim over thoſe of their own nation was allowed to be exerciſed. A young man who had ſignalized himſelf by his hoſtility to the profeſſion, and had procured a commiſſion from the council at Jeruſalem to ſeize any converted Jews whom he might find at Damaſcus, ſuddenly became a proſelyte to the religion which he was going about to extirpate. The new convert not only ſhared, upon this extraordinary change, the fate of his companions, but brought upon himſelf a double meaſure of enmity from the party which he had left. The Jews at Damaſcus, upon his return to that city, watched the gates night and day with ſo much diligence, that he eſcaped from their hands only by being let down in a baſket by the wall. Nor did he find himſelf in greater ſafety at Jeruſalem, whither he immediately repaired. Attempts were there alſo ſoon ſet on foot to deſtroy him, from the danger of which he was preſerved by being ſent away to Cilicia, his native country.

For ſome reaſon, not mentioned, perhaps not

not known, but probably connected with the civil hiſtory of the Jews, or with ſome danger * which engroſſed the public attention, an intermiſſion about this time took place in the ſufferings of the Chriſtians. This happened, at the moſt only ſeven or eight, perhaps only three or four, years after Chriſt's death. Within which period, and notwithſtanding that the late perſecution occupied part of it, churches, or ſocieties of believers, had been formed in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria; for we read that the churches in theſe countries "had *now reſt*, and were edified, and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt, were multiplied †." The original preachers of the religion did not remit their

* Dr. Lardner (in which he is followed alſo by Dr. Benſon) aſcribes this ceſſation of the perſecution of the Chriſtians to the attempt of Caligula to ſet up his own ſtatue in the Temple of Jeruſalem, and to the conſternation thereby excited in the minds of the Jewiſh people; which conſternation for a ſeaſon ſuſpended every other conteſt.

† Acts ix. 31.

labours

labours or activity during this ſeaſon of quietneſs; for we find one, and he a very principal perſon amongſt them, paſſing throughout all quarters. We find alſo thoſe who had been before expelled from Jeruſalem by the perſecution which raged there, travelling as far as Phœnice, Cyprus, and Antioch*: and laſtly, we find Jeruſalem again the centre of the miſſion, the place whither the preachers returned from their ſeveral excurſions, where they reported the conduct and effects of their miniſtry, where queſtions of public concern were canvaſſed and ſettled, from whence directions were ſought, and teachers ſent forth.

The time of this tranquillity did not, however, continue long. Herod Agrippa, who had lately acceded to the government of Judea, "ſtretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church†." He began his cruelty by beheading one of the twelve original apoſtles, a kinſman and conſtant compa-

* Acts xi. 19. † Acts xii. 1.

nion

nion of the founder of the religion. Perceiving that this execution gratified the Jews, he proceeded to ſeize, in order to put to death, another of the number; and him, like the former, aſſociated with Chriſt during his life, and eminently active in the ſervice ſince his death. This man was, however, delivered from priſon, as the account ſtates*, miraculouſly, and made his eſcape from Jeruſalem.

Theſe things are related, not in the general terms under which, in giving the outlines of the hiſtory, we have here mentioned them, but with the utmoſt particularity of names, perſons, places, and circumſtances; and, what is deſerving of notice, without the ſmalleſt diſcoverable propenſity in the hiſtorian to magnify the fortitude, or exaggerate the ſufferings of his party. When they fled for their lives, he tells us. When the churches had reſt, he remarks it. When the people took their part, he does not leave

* Acts xii. 3—17.

it

it without notice. When the apoſtles were carried a ſecond time before the Sanhedrim, he is careful to obſerve that they were brought without violence. When milder councils were ſuggeſted, he gives us the author of the advice, and the ſpeech which contained it. When, in conſequence of this advice, the rulers contented themſelves with threatening the apoſtles, and commanding them to be beaten with ſtripes, without urging at that time the perſecution farther, the hiſtorian candidly and diſtinctly records their forbearance. When, therefore, in other inſtances, he ſtates heavier perſecutions, or actual martyrdoms, it is reaſonable to believe that he ſtates them becauſe they were true; and not from any wiſh to aggravate, in his account, the ſufferings which Chriſtians ſuſtained, or to extol, more than it deſerved, their patience under them.

Our hiſtory now purſues a narrower path. Leaving the reſt of the apoſtles, and the original aſſociates of Chriſt, engaged in the propagation of the new faith (and who there is not the leaſt reaſon to believe abated in their

their diligence or courage), the narrative proceeds with the ſeparate memoirs of that eminent teacher, whoſe extraordinary and ſudden converſion to the religion, and correſponding change of conduct, had before been circumſtantially deſcribed. This perſon, in conjunction with another, who appeared amongſt the earlieſt members of the ſociety at Jeruſalem, and amongſt the immediate adherents* of the twelve apoſtles, ſet out from Antioch upon the expreſs buſineſs of carrying the new religion through the various provinces of the leſſer Aſia†. During this expedition we find, that in almoſt every place to which they came, their perſons were inſulted, and their lives endangered. After being expelled from Antioch in Piſidia, they repaired to Iconium‡. At Iconium an attempt was made to ſtone them. At Lyſtra, whither they fled from Iconium, one of them actually was ſtoned, and drawn out of the city for dead§. Theſe two men, though not themſelves original apoſtles, were acting

* Acts iv. 36.
† Acts xiii. 2.
‡ Acts xiii. 50.
§ Acts xiv. 5.

in

in connection and conjunction with the original apoſtles; for, after the completion of their journey, being ſent upon a particular commiſſion to Jeruſalem, they there related to the apoſtles* and elders the events and ſucceſs of their miniſtry, and were, in return, recommended by them to the churches, "as men who had hazarded their lives in the cauſe."

The treatment which they had experienced in the firſt progreſs, did not deter them from preparing for a ſecond. Upon a diſpute, however, ariſing between them, but not connected with the common ſubject of their labours, they acted as wiſe and ſincere men would act; they did not retire in diſguſt from the ſervice in which they were engaged, but, each devoting his endeavours to the advancement of the religion, they parted from one another, and ſet forwards upon ſeparate routes. The hiſtory goes along with one of them; and the ſecond enterpriſe to him was attended with the

* Acts xv. 12—26.

ſame

ſame dangers and perſecutions as both had met with in the firſt. The apoſtle's travels hitherto had been confined to Aſia. He now croſſes, for the firſt time, the Ægean Sea, and carries with him, amongſt others, the perſon whoſe accounts ſupply the information we are ſtating*. The firſt place in Greece at which he appears to have ſtopped was Philippi in Macedonia. Here himſelf and one of his companions were cruelly whipped, caſt into priſon, and kept there under the moſt rigorous cuſtody, being thruſt, whilſt yet ſmarting with their wounds, into the inner dungeon, and their feet made faſt in the ſtocks†. Notwithſtanding this unequivocal ſpecimen of the uſage which they had to look for in that country, they went forward in the execution of their errand. After paſſing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Theſſalonica; in which city the houſe in which they lodged was aſſailed by a party of their enemies, in order to bring them out to the

* Acts xvi. 11. † V. 23, 24. 33.

populace. And when, fortunately for their preſervation, they were not found at home, the maſter of the houſe was dragged before the magiſtrate for admitting them within his doors*. Their reception at the next city was ſomething better: but neither here had they continued long before their turbulent adverſaries, the Jews, excited againſt them ſuch commotions amongſt the inhabitants, as obliged the apoſtle to make his eſcape by a private journey to Athens†. The extremity of the progreſs was Corinth. His abode in this city, for ſome time, ſeems to have been without moleſtation. At length, however, the Jews found means to ſtir up an inſurrection againſt him, and to bring him before the tribunal of the Roman preſident‡. It was to the contempt which that magiſtrate entertained for the Jews and their controverſies, of which he accounted Chriſtianity to be one, that our apoſtle owed his deliverance§.

* Acts xvii. 1—5 † V. 13.
‡ Acts xviii. 12. § V. 18.

This

This indefatigable teacher, after leaving Corinth, returned by Epheſus into Syria; and again viſited Jeruſalem, and the ſociety of Chriſtians in that city, which, as hath been repeatedly obſerved, ſtill continued the center of the miſſion*. It ſuited not, however, with the activity of his zeal to remain long at Jeruſalem. We find him going from thence to Antioch, and, after ſome ſtay there, traverſing once more the northern provinces of Aſia Minor†. This progreſs ended at Epheſus; in which city the apoſtle continued in the daily exerciſe of his miniſtry two years, and until his ſucceſs, at length, excited the apprehenſions of thoſe who were intereſted in the ſupport of the national worſhip. Their clamour produced a tumult, in which he had nearly loſt his life‡. Undiſmayed, however, by the dangers to which he ſaw himſelf expoſed, he was driven from Epheſus only to renew his labours in Greece§. After paſſing over Macedonia, he thence

* Acts xviii. 22. † V. 23.
‡ Acts xix. 1. 9, 10. § V. 29. 31.

proceeded to his former ſtation at Corinth*. When he had formed his deſign of returning by a direct courſe from Corinth into Syria, he was compelled by a conſpiracy of the Jews, who were prepared to intercept him on his way, to trace back his ſteps through Macedonia to Philippi, and from thence to take ſhipping into Aſia. Along the coaſt of Aſia he purſued his voyage with all the expedition he could command, in order to reach Jeruſalem againſt the feaſt of Pentecoſt†. His reception at Jeruſalem was of a piece with the uſage he had experienced from the Jews in other places. He had been only a few days in that city when the populace, inſtigated by ſome of his old opponents in Aſia, who attended this feaſt, ſeized him in the temple, forced him out of it, and were ready immediately to have deſtroyed him, had not the ſudden preſence of the Roman guard reſcued him out of their hands‡. The officer, however, who had thus ſeaſonably interpoſed, acted from his

* Acts xix. 1. † V. 16. ‡ Acts xxi. 27--33.

care

care of the public peace, with the preſervation of which he was charged, and not from any favour to the apoſtle, or indeed any diſpoſition to exerciſe either juſtice or humanity towards him; for he had no ſooner ſecured his perſon in the fortreſs, than he was proceeding to examine him by torture*.

From this time to the concluſion of the hiſtory, the apoſtle remains in public cuſtody of the Roman government. After eſcaping aſſaſſination by a fortunate diſcovery of the plot, and delivering himſelf from the influence of his enemies by an appeal to the audience of the emperor†, he was ſent, but not until he had ſuffered two years impriſonment, to Rome‡. He reached Italy after a tedious voyage, and after encountering in his paſſage the perils of a deſperate ſhipwreck§. But although ſtill a priſoner, and his fate ſtill depending, neither the various and long continued ſufferings which he had

* Acts xxii. 12. 24.
† Acts xxv. 9. 11.
‡ Acts xxiv. 27.
§ Acts xxvii.

 undergone,

undergone, nor the danger of his preſent ſituation, deterred him from perſiſting in preaching the religion; for the hiſtorian cloſes the account by telling us, that, for two years, he received all that came unto him in his own hired houſe, where he was permitted to dwell with a ſoldier that guarded him, "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching thoſe things which concern the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, with all confidence."

Now the hiſtorian, from whom we have drawn this account, in the part of his narrative which relates to St. Paul, is ſupported by the ſtrongeſt corroborating teſtimony that a hiſtory can receive. We are in poſſeſſion of letters written by St. Paul himſelf upon the ſubject of his miniſtry, and either written during the period which the hiſtory compriſes, or, if written afterwards, reciting and referring to the tranſactions of that period. Theſe letters, without borrowing from the hiſtory, or the hiſtory from them, unintentionally confirm the account which the hiſtory delivers in a great variety of particulars.

What

What belongs to our preſent purpoſe is the deſcription exhibited of the apoſtle's ſufferings: and the repreſentation, given in the hiſtory, of the dangers and diſtreſſes which he underwent, not only agrees, in general, with the language which he himſelf uſes, whenever he ſpeaks of his life or miniſtry, but is alſo, in many inſtances, atteſted by a ſpecific correſpondency of time, place, and order of events. If the hiſtorian puts down in his narrative that at Philippi the apoſtle "was beaten with many ſtripes, caſt into priſon, and there treated with rigor and indignity *," we find him, in a letter † to a neighbouring church, reminding his converts, that, "after he had ſuffered before, and was ſhamefully entreated at Philippi, he was bold, nevertheleſs, to ſpeak unto them (to whoſe city he next came) the Goſpel of God." If the hiſtory relate ‡, that, at Theſſalonica, the houſe in which the apoſtle was lodged, when he firſt came to that place, was aſſaulted by the populace, and the maſter of it dragged be-

* Acts xvi. 24. † 1 Theſſ. ii. 2. ‡ Acts xvii. 57.

fore the magiſtrate for admitting ſuch a gueſt within his doors, the apoſtle, in his letters to the Chriſtians of Theſſalonica, calls to their remembrance "how they had received the Goſpel in much affliction*." If the hiſtory deliver an account of an inſurrection at Epheſus, which had nearly coſt the apoſtle his life, we have the apoſtle himſelf, in a letter written a ſhort time after his departure from that city, deſcribing his deſpair, and returning thanks for his deliverance †. If the hiſtory inform us, that the apoſtle was expelled from Antioch in Piſidia, attempted to be ſtoned at Iconium, and actually ſtoned at Lyſtra, there is preſerved a letter from him to a favorite convert, whom, as the ſame hiſtory tells us, he firſt met with in theſe parts; in which letter he appeals to that diſciple's knowledge "of the perſecutions which befel him at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lyſtra ‡." If the hiſtory make the apoſtle, in his ſpeech to the Epheſian elders, remind them, as one

* 1 Theſſ. i. 6. † Acts xix. 2 Cor. i. 8, 9.
‡ Acts xiii. 50. xix. 5. 19. 2 Tim. iii. 10, 11.

proof

proof of the diſintereſtedneſs of his views, that, to their knowledge, he had ſupplied his own and the neceſſities of his companions by perſonal labour *, we find the ſame apoſtle, in a letter written during his reſidence at Epheſus, aſſerting of himſelf, " that even to that hour he laboured, working with his own hands †.

Theſe coincidences, together with many relative to other parts of the apoſtle's hiſtory; and *all* drawn from independent ſources, not only confirm the truth of the account, in the particular points as to which they are obſerved, but add much to the credit of the narrative in all its parts; and ſupport the author's profeſſion of being a contemporary of the perſon whoſe hiſtory he writes, and, throughout a material portion of his narrative, a companion.

What the epiſtles of the apoſtles declare of the ſuffering ſtate of Chriſtianity, the writ-

* Acts xx. 34. † 1 Cor. iv. 11, 12.

ings

ings which remain of their companions, and immediate followers expreſsly confirm.

Clement, who is honourably mentioned by St. Paul in his epiſtle to the Philippians *, hath left us his atteſtation to this point in the following words: "Let us take (ſays he) the examples of our own age. Through zeal and envy the moſt faithful and righteous pillars of the church have been perſecuted even to the moſt grievous deaths. Let us ſet before our eyes *the holy apoſtles*. Peter, by unjuſt envy, underwent, not one or two, but many ſufferings; till at laſt being martyred, he went to the place of glory that was due unto him. For the ſame cauſe did Paul, in like manner, receive the reward of his patience. Seven times he was in bonds; he was whipped, was ſtoned; he preached both in the eaſt and in the weſt, leaving behind him the glorious report of his faith: and ſo having taught the whole world righteouſneſs, and for that end travelled even

* Philip. iv. 3.

unto

unto the utmoſt bounds of the weſt, he at laſt ſuffered martyrdom by the command of the governors, and departed out of the world, and went unto his holy place, being become a moſt eminent pattern of patience unto all ages. To theſe holy apoſtles were joined a very great number of others, who, having through envy undergone, in like manner, many pains and torments, have left a glorious example to us. For this, not only men, but women, have been perſecuted; and having ſuffered very grievous and cruel puniſhments, have finiſhed the courſe of their faith with firmneſs *."

Hermas, ſaluted by St. Paul in his Epiſtle to the Romans, in a piece very little connected with hiſtorical recitals, thus ſpeaks— "Such as have believed and ſuffered death for the name of Chriſt, and have endured with a ready mind, and have given up their lives with all their hearts †."

* Clem. ad Cor. c. v. vi. Abp. Wake's tranſ.

† Shepherd of Hermas, c. xxviii.

Polycarp,

Polycarp, the diſciple of John, though all that remains of his works be a very ſhort epiſtle, has not left this ſubject unnoticed.—"I exhort (ſays he) all of you, that ye obey the word of righteouſneſs, and exerciſe all patience, which ye have ſeen ſet forth before your eyes, not only in the bleſſed Ignatius, and Lorimus and Rufus, but in others among yourſelves, and in *Paul himſelf and the reſt of the apoſtles*; being confident in this, that all theſe have not run in vain, but in faith and righteouſneſs; and are gone to the place that was due to them from the Lord, with whom alſo they ſuffered. For they loved not this preſent world, but him who died and was raiſed again by God for us *."

Ignatius, the contemporary of Polycarp, recogniſes the ſame topic, briefly indeed, but poſitively and preciſely. "For this cauſe (*i. e.* for having felt and handled Chriſt's body after his reſurrection, and being convinced, as Ignatius expreſſes it, both by his

* Pol. ad Phil. c. ix.

fleſh

flesh and spirit), they (*i. e.* Peter, and those who were present with Peter at Christ's appearance) despised death, and were found to be above it *."

Would the reader know what a persecution in these days was, I would refer him to a circular letter, written by the church of Smyrna soon after the death of Polycarp, who, it will be remembered, had lived with St. John; and which letter is entitled a relation of that bishop's martyrdom. "The sufferings (say they) of all the other martyrs were blessed and generous, which they underwent according to the will of God. For so it becomes us, who are more religious than others, to ascribe the power and ordering of all things unto him. And indeed who can choose but admire the greatness of their minds, and that admirable patience and love of their master, which then appeared in them? who, when they were so flayed with whipping, that the frame and structure of

* 19 Ep. Smyr. c. iii.

their

their bodies were laid open to their very inward veins and arteries, nevertheleſs endured it. In like manner, thoſe who were condemned to the beaſts, and kept a long time in priſon, underwent many cruel torments, being forced to lie upon ſharp ſpikes laid under their bodies, and tormented with divers other ſorts of puniſhments; that ſo, if it were poſſible, the tyrant, by the length of their ſufferings, might have brought them to deny Chriſt *."

* Rel. Mor. Pol. c. ii.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

There is ſatisfactory evidence, that many, profeſſing to have been original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted, from the ſame motives, to new rules of conduct.

UPON the hiſtory, of which the laſt chapter contains an abſtract, there are a few obſervations which it may be proper to make, by way of applying its teſtimony to the particular propoſitions for which we contend.

I. Although our ſcripture hiſtory leaves the general account of the apoſtles in an early part of the narrative, and proceeds with the ſeparate account of one particular apoſtle,

apoſtle, yet the information which it delivers ſo far extends to the reſt, as it ſhews *the nature of the ſervice.* When we ſee one apoſtle ſuffering perſecution in the diſcharge of his commiſſion, we ſhall not believe, without evidence, that the ſame office could, at the ſame time, be attended with eaſe and ſafety to others. And this fair and reaſonable inference is confirmed by the direct atteſtation of the letters, to which we have ſo often referred. The writer of theſe letters not only alludes, in numerous paſſages, to his own ſufferings, but ſpeaks of the reſt of the apoſtles as enduring like ſufferings with himſelf. "I think that God hath ſet forth *us the apoſtles* laſt, as it were, appointed to death; for we are made a ſpectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men—even unto this preſent hour, we both hunger and thirſt, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bleſs; being perſecuted, we ſuffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and as the offſcouring of all things

unto this day *." Add to which, that in the ſhort account that is given of the other apoſtles, in the former part of the hiſtory, and within the ſhort period which that account compriſes, we find, firſt, two of them ſeized, impriſoned, brought before the Sanhedrim, and threatened with further puniſhment †; then, the whole number impriſoned and beaten ‡: ſoon afterwards, one of their adherents ſtoned to death, and ſo hot a perſecution raiſed againſt the ſect, as to drive moſt of them out of the place; a ſhort time only ſucceeding, before one of the twelve was beheaded, and another ſentenced to the ſame fate; and all this paſſing in the ſingle city of Jeruſalem, and within ten years after the founder's death, and the commencement of the inſtitution.

II. Secondly; We take no credit at preſent for the miraculous part of the narrative, nor do we inſiſt upon the correctneſs of ſingle paſſages of it. If the whole ſtory be not a novel, a romance; the whole action a

* 1 Cor. iv. et ſeq. † Acts iv. 3. 21. ‡ Acts v. 18. 40.

dream; if Peter, and James, and Paul, and the reſt of the apoſtles, mentioned in the account, be not all imaginary perſons; if their letters be not all forgeries, and, what is more, forgeries of names and characters which never exiſted; then is there evidence in our hands ſufficient to ſupport the only fact we contend for (and which, I repeat again, is, in itſelf, highly probable), that the original followers of Jeſus Chriſt exerted great endeavours to propagate his religion, and underwent great labours, dangers, and ſufferings, in conſequence of their undertaking.

III. The general reality of the apoſtolic hiſtory is ſtrongly confirmed by the conſideration, that it, in truth, does no more than aſſign adequate cauſes for effects which certainly were produced, and deſcribe conſequences naturally reſulting from ſituations which certainly exiſted. The *effects* were certainly there, of which this hiſtory ſets forth the cauſe, and origin, and progreſs. It is acknowledged on all hands, becauſe it

is recorded by other teſtimony than that of the Chriſtians themſelves, that the religion began to prevail at that time, and in that country. It is very difficult to conceive how it could begin, or prevail at all, without the exertions of the founder and his followers in propagating the new perſuaſion. The hiſtory now in our hands deſcribes theſe exertions, the perſons employed, the means and endeavours made uſe of, and the labours undertaken in the proſecution of this purpoſe. Again, the treatment which the hiſtory repreſents the firſt propagators of the religion to have experienced, was no other than what naturally reſulted from the ſituation in which they were confeſſedly placed. It is admitted that the religion was adverſe, in a great degree, to the reigning opinions, and to the hopes and wiſhes of the nation to which it was firſt introduced; and that it overthrew, ſo far as it was received, the eſtabliſhed theology and worſhip of every other country. We cannot feel much reluctance in believing that, when the meſſengers of ſuch a ſyſtem

went about not only publiſhing their opinions, but collecting proſelytes, and forming regular ſocieties of proſelytes, they ſhould meet with oppoſition in their attempts, or that this oppoſition ſhould ſometimes proceed to fatal extremities. Our hiſtory details examples of this oppoſition, and of the ſufferings and dangers which the emiſſaries of the religion underwent, perfectly agreeable to what might reaſonably be expected, from the nature of their undertaking, compared with the character of the age and country in which it was carried on.

IV. Fourthly; The records before us ſupply evidence of what formed another member of our general propoſition, and what, as hath already been obſerved, is highly probable, and almoſt a neceſſary conſequence of their new profeſſion, viz. that, together with activity and courage in propagating the religion, the primitive followers of Jeſus aſſumed, upon their converſion, a new and peculiar courſe of private life. Immediately after their maſter was withdrawn from

from them, we hear of their "continuing with one accord in prayer and ſupplication*;" of their "continuing daily with one accord in the temple †;" of "many being gathered together praying ‡." We know what ſtrict injunctions were laid upon the converts by their teachers. Wherever they came, the firſt word of their preaching was, "Repent!" We know that theſe injunctions obliged them to refrain from many ſpecies of licentiouſneſs, which were not, at that time, reputed criminal. We know the rules of purity, and the maxims of benevolence, which Chriſtians read in their books; concerning which rules, it is enough to obſerve, that, if they were, I will not ſay, completely obeyed, but in any degree regarded, they would produce a ſyſtem of conduct, and, what is more difficult to preſerve, a diſpoſition of mind, and a regulation of affections, different from any thing to which they had hitherto been accuſtomed, and different from what they would ſee in others. The change

* Acts i. 14. † Acts ii. 46. ‡ Acts xii. 12.

and distinction of manners, which resulted from their new character, is perpetually referred to in the letters of their teachers. "And you hath he quickened, who *were* dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in *times past* ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*."—"For the *time past of our life* may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lust, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries, *wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot*†." St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, after enumerating, as his manner was, a catalogue of vicious characters, adds, "Such *were* some

* Eph. ii. 1—3. see also Tit. iii. 3. † 1 Pet. iv. 3, 4.

of

of you, but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified *." In like manner, and alluding to the ſame change of practices and ſentiment, he aſks the Roman Chriſtians "what fruit they had in thoſe things whereof they are *now* aſhamed †?" The phraſes which the ſame writer employs to deſcribe the moral condition of Chriſtians, compared with their condition before they became Chriſtians, ſuch as "newneſs of life," being "freed from ſin," being "dead to ſin;" "the deſtruction of the body of ſin, that, *for the future*, they ſhould not ſerve ſin;" "children of light and of the day," as oppoſed to "children of darkneſs and of the night," "not ſleeping as others," imply, at leaſt, a new ſyſtem of obligation, and, probably, a new ſeries of conduct, commencing with their converſion.

The teſtimony which Pliny bears to the behaviour of the new ſect in his time, and which teſtimony comes not more than fifty

* 1 Cor. vi. 11. † Rom. vi. 21.

years after that of St. Paul, is very applicable to the ſubject under conſideration. The character which this writer gives of the Chriſtians of that age, and which was drawn from a pretty accurate enquiry, becauſe he conſidered their moral principles as the point in which the magiſtrate was intereſted, is as follows:—He tells the emperor, " that ſome of thoſe who had relinquiſhed the ſociety, or who, to ſave themſelves, pretended that they had relinquiſhed it, affirmed that they were wont to meet together, on a ſtated day, before it was light, and ſung among themſelves alternately a hymn to Chriſt as a God; and to bind themſelves, by an oath, not to the commiſſion of any wickedneſs, but that they would not be guilty of theft or robbery, or adultery; that they would never falſify their word, nor deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it." This proves that a morality, more pure and ſtrict than was ordinary, prevailed at that time in Chriſtian ſocieties. And to me it appears, that we are authoriſed to carry this teſtimony back to the age of the

the apoſtles; becauſe it is not probable that the immediate hearers and diſciples of Chriſt were more relaxed than their ſucceſſors in Pliny's time, or the miſſionaries of the religion than thoſe whom they taught.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

There is ſatisfactory evidence, that many, profeſſing to have been original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted from the ſame motives to new rules of conduct.

WHEN we conſider, firſt, the prevalency of the religion at this hour; ſecondly, the only credible account which can be given of its origin, viz. the activity of the founder and his aſſociates; thirdly, the oppoſition which that activity muſt naturally have excited; fourthly, the fate of the founder of the religion, atteſted by heathen writers as well as our own; fifthly, the teſtimony of the ſame writers to the ſufferings of Chriſtians, either contemporary with, or immediately ſucceeding,

ing, the original ſettlers of the inſtitution; ſixthly, predictions of the ſufferings of his followers aſcribed to the founder of the religion, which aſcription alone proves, either that ſuch predictions were delivered and fulfilled, or that the writers of Chriſt's life were induced by the event to attribute ſuch predictions to him; ſeventhly, letters now in our poſſeſſion, written by ſome of the principal agents in the tranſaction, referring expreſsly to extreme labours, dangers, and ſufferings, ſuſtained by themſelves and their companions; laſtly, a hiſtory purporting to be written by a fellow traveller of one of the new teachers, and, by its unſophiſticated correſpondency with letters of that perſon ſtill extant, proving itſelf to be written by ſome one well acquainted with the ſubject of the narrative, which hiſtory contains accounts of travels, perſecutions, and martyrdoms, anſwering to what the former reaſons lead us expect: when we lay together theſe conſiderations, which, taken ſeparately, are, I think, correctly ſuch as I have ſtated them in the preceding chapters, there cannot much

doubt

doubt remain upon our minds, but that a number of perſons at that time appeared in the world, publicly advancing an extraordinary ſtory, and for the ſake of propagatting the belief of that ſtory, voluntarily incurring great perſonal dangers, traverſing ſeas and kingdoms, exerting great induſtry, and ſuſtaining great extremities of ill uſage and perſecution. It is alſo proved that the ſame perſons, in conſequence of their perſuaſion or pretended perſuaſion of the truth of what they aſſerted, entered upon a courſe of life in many reſpects new and ſingular.

From the clear and acknowledged parts of the caſe, I think it to be likewiſe in the higheſt degree probable, that the ſtory, for which theſe perſons voluntarily expoſed themſelves to the fatigues and hardſhips which they endured, was a *miraculous* ſtory; I mean, that they pretended to miraculous evidence of ſome kind or other. They had nothing elſe to ſtand upon. The deſignation of the perſon, that is to ſay, that Jeſus of Nazareth, rather than any other perſon, was the

the Meſſiah, and as ſuch the ſubject of their miniſtry, could only be founded upon ſupernatural tokens attributed to him. Here were no victories, no conqueſts, no revolutions, no ſurpriſing elevation of fortune, no achievements of valour, of ſtrength, or of policy, to appeal to; no diſcoveries in any art or ſcience, no great efforts of genius or learning to produce. A Galilean peaſant was denounced to the world as a divine lawgiver. A young man of mean condition, of a private and ſimple life, and who had wrought no deliverance for the Jewiſh nation, was declared to be their Meſſiah. This, without aſcribing to him at the ſame time ſome proofs of his miſſion, (and what other but ſupernatural proofs could there be?) was too abſurd a claim to be either imagined, or attempted, or credited. In whatever degree, or in whatever part, the religion was *argumentative*, when it came to the queſtion, "is the carpenter's ſon of Nazareth the perſon whom we are to receive and obey?" there was nothing but the miracles attributed to him, by which his pretenſions could be main-

maintained for a moment. Every controverſy and every queſtion muſt preſuppoſe theſe; for, however ſuch controverſies, when they did ariſe, might, and naturally would, be diſcuſſed upon their own grounds of argumentation, without citing the miraculous evidence which had been aſſerted to attend the founder of the religion (which would have been to enter upon another, and a more general queſtion), yet we are to bear in mind, that without previouſly ſuppoſing the exiſtence or the pretence of ſuch evidence, there could have been no place for the diſcuſſion of the argument at all. Thus, for example, whether the prophecies, which the Jews, interpreted to belong to the Meſſiah, were, or were not, applicable to the hiſtory of Jeſus of Nazareth, was a natural ſubject of debate in thoſe times: and the debate would proceed, without recurring at every turn to his miracles, becauſe it ſet out with ſuppoſing theſe; inaſmuch as without miraculous marks and tokens (real or pretended), or without ſome ſuch great change effected by his means in the public condition

tion of the country, as might have ſatisfied the then received interpretation of theſe prophecies, I do not ſee how the queſtion could ever have been entertained. Apollos, we read, " mightily convinced the Jews, ſhewing by the ſcriptures that Jeſus was Chriſt* ;" but unleſs Jeſus had exhibited ſome diſtinction of his perſon, ſome proof of ſupernatural power, the argument from the old ſcriptures could have had no place. It had nothing to attach upon. A young man calling himſelf the Son of God, gathering a crowd about him, and delivering to them lectures of morality, could not have excited ſo much as a doubt amongſt the Jews whether he was the object in whom a long ſeries of ancient prophecies terminated, from the completion of which they had formed ſuch magnificent expectations, and expectations of a nature ſo oppoſite to what appeared: I mean no ſuch doubt could exiſt when they had the whole caſe before them, when they ſaw him put to death for his officiouſneſs, and when by

* Acts xviii. 28.

his

his death the evidence concerning him was closed. Again, the *effect* of the Messiah's coming, supposing Jesus to have been him, upon Jews, upon Gentiles, upon their relation to each other, upon their acceptance with God, upon their duties and their expectations; his nature, authority, office, and agency; were likely to become subjects of much consideration with the early votaries of the religion, and to occupy their attention and writings. I should not, however, expect that in these disquisitions, whether preserved in the form of letters, speeches, or set treatises, frequent or very direct mention of his miracles would occur. Still miraculous evidence lay at the bottom of the argument. In the *primary* question, miraculous pretensions, and miraculous pretensions alone, were what they had to rely upon.

That the original story was miraculous, is very fairly also inferred from the miraculous powers which were laid claim to by the Christians of succeeding ages. If the accounts of these miracles be true, it was a con-

continuation of the ſame powers; if they be falſe, it was an *imitation*, I will not ſay, of what had been wrought, but of what had been reported to have been wrought, by thoſe who preceded them. That imitation ſhould follow reality; fiction be grafted upon truth; that if miracles were performed at firſt, miracles ſhould be pretended afterwards, agrees ſo well with the ordinary courſe of human affairs, that we can have no great difficulty in believing it. The contrary ſuppoſition is very improbable, namely, that miracles ſhould be pretended to by the followers of the apoſtles and firſt emiſſaries of the religion, when none were pretended to, either in their own perſons or that of their maſter, by theſe apoſtles and emiſſaries themſelves.

CHAP. VII.

There is ſatisfactory evidence, that many, profeſſing to have been original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted, from the ſame motives, to new rules of conduct.

IT once then being proved, that the firſt propagators of the Chriſtian inſtitution did exert great activity, and ſubject themſelves to great dangers and ſufferings, in conſequence, and for the ſake of an extraordinary, and I think we may ſay, of a miraculous ſtory of ſome kind or other; the next great queſtion is, Whether the account, which our ſcriptures contain, be that ſtory; that which theſe men delivered, and for which they acted and ſuffered as they did?

This queſtion is, in effect, no other than, whether the ſtory which Chriſtians have *now*, be the ſtory which Chriſtians had *then*? and of this the following proofs may be deduced from general conſiderations, and from conſiderations prior to any enquiry into the particular reaſons and teſtimonies by which the authority of our hiſtories is ſupported.

In the firſt place, there exiſts no trace or veſtige of any other ſtory. It is not, like the death of Cyrus the Great, a competition between oppoſite accounts, or between the credit of different hiſtorians. There is not a document, or ſcrap of account, either contemporary with the commencement of Chriſtianity, or extant within many ages after that commencement, which aſſigns a hiſtory ſubſtantially different from ours. The remote, brief, and incidental notices of the affair, which are found in heathen writers, ſo far as they do go, go along with us. They bear teſtimony to theſe facts; that the inſtitution originated from Jeſus; that the

founder was put to death, as a malefactor, at Jeruſalem, by the authority of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; that the religion nevertheleſs ſpread in that city, and throughout Judea; and that it was propagated from thence to diſtant countries; that the converts were numerous; that they ſuffered great hardſhips and injuries for their profeſſion; and that all this took place in the age of the world which our books have aſſigned. They go on further, to deſcribe the *manners* of Chriſtians in terms perfectly conformable to the accounts extant in our books; that they were wont to aſſemble on a certain day; that they ſung hymns to Chriſt as to a god; that they bound themſelves by an oath not to commit any crime, but to abſtain from theft and adultery, to adhere ſtrictly to their promiſes, and not to deny money depoſited in their hands *; that they worſhipped him who was crucified in Paleſtine; that this their firſt law-giver had taught them

* Vide Pliny's Letter. Bonnet, in his lively way of expreſſing himſelf, ſays—"Comparing Pliny's Letter with

them that they were all brethren; that they had a great contempt for the things of this world, and looked upon them as common; that they flew to one another's relief; that they cherifhed ftrong hopes of immortality; that they defpifed death, and furrendered themfelves to fufferings *." This is the account of writers who viewed the fubject at a great diftance; who were uninformed and unintereſted about it. It bears the charac-

with the account in the Acts, it feems to me that I had not taken up another author, but that I was ſtill reading the hiſtorian of that extraordinary ſociety." This is ſtrong; but there is undoubtedly an affinity, and all the affinity that could be expected.

* "It is incredible what expedition they uſe when any of their friends are known to be in trouble. In a word, they ſpare nothing upon ſuch an occaſion—for theſe miſerable men have no doubt they ſhall be immortal, and live forever; therefore they contemn death, and many ſurrender themſelves to ſufferings. Moreover, their firſt law-giver has taught them that they are all brethren, when once they have turned and renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worſhip this maſter of theirs who was crucified, and engage to live according to his laws. They have alſo a ſovereign contempt for all the things of this world, and look upon them as common." Lucian. de Morte Peregrini, t. i. p. 565, ed. Græv.

ters of ſuch an account upon the face of it, becauſe it deſcribes effects, namely, the appearance in the world of a new religion, and the converſion of great multitudes to it, without deſcending, in the ſmalleſt degree, to the detail of the tranſaction upon which it was founded, the interior of the inſtitution, the evidence or arguments offered by thoſe who drew over others to it. Yet ſtill here is no contradiction of our ſtory; no other or different ſtory ſet up againſt it; but ſo far a confirmation of it, as that, in the general points upon which the heathen account touches, it agrees with that which we find in our own books.

The ſame may be obſerved of the very few Jewiſh writers, of that and the adjoining period, which have come down to us. Whatever they omit, or whatever difficulties we may find in explaining the omiſſion, they advance no other hiſtory of the tranſaction than that which we acknowledge. Joſephus, who wrote his Antiquities, or Hiſtory of the Jews, about ſixty years after the com-

commencement of Chriſtianity, in a paſſage generally admitted as genuine, makes mention of John under the name of John the Baptiſt; that he was a preacher of virtue; that he baptized his proſelytes; that he was well received by the people; that he was impriſoned and put to death by Herod; and that Herod lived in a criminal cohabitation with Herodias his brother's wife*. In another paſſage, allowed by many, although not without conſiderable queſtion being moved about it, we hear of "James, the brother of him who was called Jeſus, and of his being put to death †." In a third paſſage, extant in every copy that remains of Joſephus's hiſtory, but the authenticity of which has nevertheleſs been long diſputed, we have an explicit teſtimony to the ſubſtance of our hiſtory in theſe words:—"At that time lived Jeſus, a wiſe man, if he may be called a man, for he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher of ſuch

* Antiq. l. xviii. cap. v. ſect. 1, 2.

† Antiq. l. xx. cap. ix. ſect. 1.

men as received the truth with pleaſure. He drew over to him many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Chriſt; and when Pilate, at the inſtigation of the chief men among us had condemned him to the croſs, they, who before had conceived an affection for him, did not ceaſe to adhere to him; for on the third day he appeared to them alive again, the divine prophets having foretold theſe and many wonderful things concerning him. And the ſect of the Chriſtians, ſo called from him, ſubſiſts to this time*." Whatever become of the controverſy concerning the genuineneſs of this paſſage; whether Joſephus go the whole length of our hiſtory, which, if the paſſage be ſincere, he does; or whether he proceed only a very little way with us, which, if the paſſage be rejected, we confeſs to be the caſe; ſtill what we aſſerted is true, that he gives no other or different hiſtory of the ſubject from ours, no other or different account of the origin of the inſtitution. And I think alſo

* Antiq. l. xviii. cap. iii. ſect. 3.

that

that it may with great reaſon be contended, either that the paſſage is genuine, or that the ſilence of Joſephus was *deſigned*. For, although we ſhould lay aſide the authority of our own books entirely, yet when Tacitus, who wrote not twenty, perhaps not ten, years after Joſephus in his account of a period in which Joſephus was near thirty years of age, tells us, that a vaſt multitude of Chriſtians were condemned at Rome; that they derived their denomination from Chriſt, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death, as a criminal, by the procurator Pontius Pilate; that the ſuperſtition had ſpread not only over Judea, the ſource of the evil, but had reached Rome alſo:—when Suetonius, an hiſtorian contemporary with Tacitus, relates that, in the time of Claudius, the Jews were making diſturbances at Rome, Chreſtus being their leader; and that, during the reign of Nero, the Chriſtians were puniſhed; under both which emperors Joſephus lived:—when Pliny, who wrote his celebrated epiſtle not more than thirty years after the publication of Joſephus's hiſtory,

hiſtory, found the Chriſtians in ſuch numbers in the province of Bithynia as to draw from him a complaint, that the contagion had ſeized cities, towns, and villages, and had ſo ſeized them as to produce a general deſertion of the public rites; and when, as hath already been obſerved, there is no reaſon for imagining that the Chriſtians were more numerous in Bithynia than in many other parts of the Roman empire: it cannot, I ſhould ſuppoſe, after this, be believed, that the religion, and the tranſaction upon which it was founded, were too obſcure to engage the attention of Joſephus, or to obtain a a place in his hiſtory. Perhaps he did not know how to repreſent the buſineſs, and diſpoſed of his difficulties by paſſing it over in ſilence. Euſebius wrote the life of Conſtantine, yet omits intirely the moſt remarkable circumſtance in that life, the death of his ſon Criſpus; undoubtedly for the reaſon here given. The reſerve of Joſephus upon the ſubject of Chriſtianity appears alſo in his paſſing over the baniſhment of the Jews by Claudius, which Suetonius, we have ſeen, has

has recorded with an expreſs reference to Chriſt. This is at leaſt as remarkable as his ſilence about the infants of Bethlehem *. Be, however, the fact, or the cauſe of the omiſſion in Joſephus †, what it may, no other or different hiſtory on the ſubject has been given by him, or is pretended to have been given.

But farther; the whole ſeries of Chriſtian

* Michaelis has computed, and as it ſhould ſeem, fairly enough, that probably not more than twenty children periſhed by this cruel precaution. Michael. Introd. to the N. Teſt. tranſlated by Marſh. Vol. I. c. ii. ſect. 11.

† There is no notice taken of Chriſtianity in the Miſhna, a collection of Jewiſh traditions compiled about the year 180, although it contains a Tract, "De cultu peregrino," of ſtrange or idolatrous worſhip; yet it cannot be diſputed but that Chriſtianity was perfectly well known in the world at this time. There is extremely little notice of the ſubject in the Jeruſalem Talmud, compiled about the year 300, and not much more in the Babyloniſh Talmud, of the year 500, although both theſe works are of a religious nature, and although, when the firſt was compiled, Chriſtianity was upon the point of becoming the religion of the ſtate, and, when the latter was publiſhed, had been ſo for 200 years.

writers,

writers, from the firſt age of the inſtitution down to the preſent, in their diſcuſſions, apologies, arguments, and controverſies, proceed upon the general ſtory which our ſcriptures contain, and upon no other. The main facts, the principal agents, are alike in all. This argument will appear to be of great force, when it is known that we are able to trace back the ſeries of writers to a contact with the hiſtorical books of the New Teſtament, and to the age of the firſt emiſſaries of the religion, and to deduce it, by an unbroken continuation, from that end of the train to the preſent.

The remaining letters of the apoſtles (and what more original than *their* letters can we have?), though written without the remoteſt deſign of tranſmitting the hiſtory of Chriſt, or of Chriſtianity to future ages, or even of making it known to their contemporaries, incidentally diſcloſe to us the following circumſtances: "Chriſt's deſcent and family, his innocence, the meekneſs and gentleneſs of his character (a recognition which goes

to

to the whole gospel history), his exalted nature, his circumcision, transfiguration, his life of opposition and suffering, his patience and resignation, the appointment of the eucharist and the manner of it, his agony, his confession before Pontius Pilate, his stripes, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, his appearance after it, first to Peter, then to the rest of the apostles, his ascension into heaven, and his designation to be the future judge of mankind: the stated residence of the apostles at Jerusalem, the working of miracles by the first preachers of the gospel, who were also the hearers of Christ *: the successful

* Heb. ii. 3. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which, at the first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us *by them that heard him*, God also bearing them witness, both *with signs and wonders*, and with *divers miracles*, and gifts of the Holy Ghost?" I alledge this epistle without hesitation; for whatever doubts may have been raised about its author, there can be none concerning the age in which it was written. No epistle in the collection carries about it more indubitable marks of antiquity than this does. It speaks, for instance, throughout, of the temple as then standing, and of the worship of the temple

ful propagation of the religion, the perſecution of its followers, the miraculous converſion of Paul, miracles wrought by himſelf, and alledged in his controverſies with his adverſaries, and in letters to the perſons amongſt whom they were wrought; finally, that MIRACLES *were the ſigns of an apoſtle**.

In an epiſtle bearing the name of Barnabas the companion of Paul, probably genuine, certainly belonging to that age, we have the ſufferings of Chriſt, his choice of apoſtles and their number, his paſſion, the ſcarlet robe, the vinegar and gall, the mocking and piercing, the caſting lots for his coat †, his

ple as then ſubſiſting.—Heb. viii. 4. "For if he were on earth, he ſhould not be a prieſt, ſeeing there *are* prieſts that offer according to the law."—Again, Heb. xiii. 10. "We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which *ſerve* the tabernacle."

* Cor. xii. 12. "Truly *the ſigns of an apoſtle* were wrought among you in all patience, in ſigns and wonders, and mighty deeds."

† Ep. Bar. c. vii.

reſurrection

reſurrection on the eighth (*i. e.* the firſt day of the week*), and the commemorative diſtinction of that day, his manifeſtation after his reſurrection, and laſtly, his aſcenſion. We have alſo his miracles generally but poſitively referred to in the following words: "finally teaching the people of Iſrael, and *doing many wonders and ſigns among them*, he preached to them, and ſhewed the exceeding great love which he bare towards them †."

In an epiſtle of Clement, a hearer of St. Paul, although written for a purpoſe remotely connected with the Chriſtian hiſtory, we have the reſurrection of Chriſt, and the ſubſequent miſſion of the apoſtles, recorded in theſe ſatisfactory terms: "The apoſtles have preached to us from our Lord Jeſus Chriſt from God—For having received their command, and being *thoroughly aſſured by the reſurrection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, they went abroad, publiſhing that the kingdom of God was at hand ‡. We find noticed alſo,

* Ep. Bar. c. vi. † Ibid. c. v.
‡ Ep. Clem. Rom. c. xlii.

the

the humility, yet the power of Chriſt*, his deſcent from Abraham, his crucifixion. We have Peter and Paul repreſented as faithful and righteous pillars of the Church, the numerous ſufferings of Peter, the bonds, ſtripes, and ſtoning of Paul, and more particularly his extenſive and unwearied travels.

In an epiſtle of Polycarp, a diſciple of St. John, though only a brief hortatory letter, we have the humility, patience, ſufferings, reſurrection, and aſcenſion of Chriſt, together with the apoſtolic character of St. Paul, diſtinctly recognized†. Of this ſame father we are alſo aſſured by Irenæus, that he (Irenæus) had heard him relate, "what he had received from eye-witneſſes concerning the Lord, both *concerning his miracles* and his doctrine‡."

In the remaining works of Ignatius, the contemporary of Polycarp, larger than thoſe

* Ep. Clem. Rom. c. xvi.
† Pol. Ep. ad Phil. c. v. viii. ii. iii.
‡ Ir. ad Flor. ap. Euſ. l. v. c. 20.

of

of Polycarp (yet, like thoſe of Polycarp, treating of ſubjects in no wiſe leading to any recital of the Chriſtian hiſtory), the occaſional alluſions are proportionably more numerous. The deſcent of Chriſt from David, his mother Mary, his miraculous conception, the ſtar at his birth, his baptiſm by John, the reaſon aſſigned for it, his appeal to the prophets, the ointment poured on his head, his ſufferings under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, his reſurrection, the Lord's day called and kept in commemoration of it, and the Euchariſt, in both its parts, are unequivocally referred to. Upon the reſurrection this writer is even circumſtantial. He mentions the apoſtles eating and drinking with Chriſt after he was riſen, their feeling and their handling him; from which laſt circumſtance Ignatius raiſes this juſt reflection —"They believed, being convinced both by his fleſh and ſpirit; for this cauſe they deſpiſed death, and were found to be above it*."

* Ad Smyr. c. iii.

Quadratus, of the ſame age with Ignatius, has left us the following noble teſtimony: —"The works of our Saviour were always conſpicuous, for they were real; both they that were healed, and they that were raiſed from the dead: who were ſeen not only when they were healed or raiſed, but for a long time afterwards. Not only whilſt he dwelled on this earth, but alſo after his departure, and for a good while after it, inſomuch that ſome of them have reached to our times *."

Juſtin Martyr came little more than thirty years after Quadratus. From Juſtin's works, which are ſtill extant, might be collected a tolerably complete account of Chriſt's life, in all points agreeing with that which is delivered in our ſcriptures; taken indeed, in a great meaſure, from thoſe ſcriptures, but ſtill proving that this account, and no other, was the account known and extant in that age. The miracles in particular, which

* Ap. Euſ. H. E. l. iv. c. 3.

form

form the part of Chriſt's hiſtory moſt material to be traced, ſtand fully and diſtinctly recognized in the following paſſage:—" He healed thoſe who had been blind, and deaf, and lame, from their birth, cauſing, by his word, one to leap, another to hear, and a third to ſee; and by raiſing the dead, and making them to live, he induced, by his works, the men of that age to know him*."

It is unneceſſary to carry theſe citations lower, becauſe the hiſtory, after this time, occurs in ancient Chriſtian writings as familiarly as it is wont to do in modern ſermons; occurs always the ſame in ſubſtance, and always that which our evangeliſts repreſent.

This is not only true of thoſe writings of Chriſtians which are genuine, and of acknowledged authority, but it is, in a great meaſure, true of *all* their ancient writings which remain; although ſome of theſe may have been erroneouſly aſcribed to authors to

* Juſt. Dial. cum Tryph. p. 288 ed. Thirl.

whom they did not belong, or may contain falſe accounts, or may appear to be undeſerving of credit, or never indeed to have obtained any. Whatever fables they have mixed with the narrative, they preſerve the material parts, the leading facts, as we have them; and, ſo far as they do this, although they be evidence of nothing elſe, they are evidence that theſe points were *fixed*, were received and acknowledged by all Chriſtians in the ages in which the books were written. At leaſt, it may be aſſerted, that, in the places where we were moſt likely to meet with ſuch things, if ſuch things had exiſted, no reliques appear of any ſtory ſubſtantially different from the preſent, as the cauſe, or as the pretence, of the inſtitution.

Now that the original ſtory, the ſtory delivered by the firſt preachers of the inſtitution, ſhould have died away ſo entirely as to have left no record or memorial of its exiſtence, although ſo many records and memorials of the time and tranſaction remain; and that another ſtory ſhould have ſtepped into

its

its place, and gained exclusive possession of the belief of all who professed themselves disciples of the institution, is beyond any example of the corruption of even oral tradition, and still less consistent with the experience of written history: and this improbability, which is very great, is rendered still greater by the reflection, that no such *change*, as the oblivion of one story and the substitution of another, took place in any future period of the Christian æra. Christianity hath travelled through dark and turbulent ages; nevertheless it came out of the cloud and the storm, such, in substance, as it entered in. Many additions were made to the primitive history, and these entitled to different degrees of credit; many doctrinal errors also were from time to time grafted into the public creed, but still the original story remained, and remained the same. In all its principal parts it has been fixed from the beginning.

Thirdly, The religious rites and usages that prevailed amongst the early disciples of

Chriſtianity, were ſuch as belonged to, and ſprung out of, the narrative now in our hands; which accordancy ſhews, that it was the narrative upon which theſe perſons acted, and which they had received from their teachers. Our account makes the founder of the religion direct that his diſciples ſhould be baptized: we know that the firſt Chriſtians were baptized. Our account makes him direct that they ſhould hold religious aſſemblies: we find that they did hold religious aſſemblies. Our accounts make the apoſtles aſſemble upon a ſtated day in the week: we find, and that from information perfectly independent of our accounts, that the Chriſtians of the firſt century did obſerve ſtated days of aſſembling. Our hiſtories record the inſtitution of the rite which we call the Lord's Supper, and a command to repeat it in perpetual ſucceſſion: we find, amongſt the early Chriſtians, the celebration of this rite univerſal. And indeed we find concurring in all the above-mentioned obſervances, Chriſtian ſocieties of many different nations and languages, removed from one another

by

by great diſtance of place and diſſimilitude of ſituation. It is alſo extremely material to remark, that there is no room for inſinuating that our books were fabricated with a ſtudious accommodation to the uſages which obtained at the time they were written; that the authors of the books found the uſages eſtabliſhed, and framed the ſtory to account for their original. The ſcripture accounts, eſpecially of the Lord's Supper, are too ſhort and curſory, not to ſay too obſcure, and, in this view, deficient, to allow a place for any ſuch ſuſpicion*.

Amongſt the proofs of the truth of our propoſition, viz. that the ſtory, which we have *now*, is, in ſubſtance, the ſtory which the Chriſtians had *then*, or, in other words, that the accounts in our goſpels are, as to

* The reader who is converſant in theſe reſearches, by comparing the ſhort ſcripture accounts of the Chriſtian rites above mentioned with the minute and circumſtantial directions contained in the pretended apoſtolical conſtitutions, will ſee the force of this obſervation; the difference between truth and forgery.

their principal parts at leaſt, the accounts which the apoſtles and original teachers of the religion delivered, one ariſes from obſerving, that it appears by the goſpels themſelves, that the ſtory was public at the time; that the Chriſtian community was already in poſſeſſion of the ſubſtance and principal parts of the narrative. The goſpels were not the original cauſe of the Chriſtian hiſtory being believed, but were themſelves among the conſequences of that belief. This is expreſsly affirmed by St. Luke in his brief, but, as I think, very important and inſtructive preface. "Foraſmuch (ſays the evangeliſt) as many have taken in hand to ſet forth in order a declaration of thoſe things *which are moſt ſurely believed amongſt us, even as they delivered them unto us, which, from the beginning, were eye-witneſſes and miniſters of the word;* it ſeemed good to me alſo having had perfect underſtanding of all things from the very firſt, to write unto thee in order, moſt excellent Theophilus, that thou mighteſt know the certainty of thoſe things *wherein thou haſt been inſtructed.*"

This

This ſhort introduction teſtifies, that the ſubſtance of the hiſtory, which the evangeliſt was about to write, was already believed by Chriſtians; that it was believed upon the declarations of eye-witneſſes and miniſters of the word; that it formed the account of their religion, in which Chriſtians were inſtructed; that the office which the hiſtorian propoſed to himſelf, was to trace each particular to its origin, and to fix the certainty of many things which the reader had before heard of. In St. John's Goſpel, the ſame point appears from hence, that there are ſome principal facts, to which the hiſtorian refers, but which he does not relate. A remarkable inſtance of this kind is the *aſcenſion*, which is not mentioned by St. John in its place, at the concluſion of his hiſtory, but which is plainly referred to in the following words of the ſixth chapter*: "What and if ye ſhall ſee the Son of man aſcend up where he was before." And ſtill more poſitively in the words which Chriſt, according to our evan-

* Alſo John iii. 13. and xvi. 28.

geliſt,

geliſt, ſpoke to Mary after his reſurrection, "Touch me not, for I am not yet aſcended to my Father; but go unto my brethren, and ſay unto them, I aſcend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God*." This can only be accounted for by the ſuppoſition, that St. John wrote under a ſenſe of the notoriety of Chriſt's aſcenſion, amongſt thoſe by whom his book was likely to be read. The ſame account muſt alſo be given of St. Matthew's omiſſion of the ſame important fact. The thing was very well known, and it did not occur to the hiſtorian, that it was neceſſary to add any particulars concerning it. It agrees alſo with this ſolution, and with no other, that neither Matthew nor John diſpoſes of the perſon of our Lord in any manner whatever. Other intimations in St. John's Goſpel of the then general notoriety of the ſtory are the following: His manner of introducing his narrative, (ch. i. v. 15.) "John bare witneſs of him, and cried, ſaying," evidently preſuppoſes

* John xx. 17.

that

that his readers knew who John was. His rapid parenthetical reference to John's imprisonment, "for John was not yet cast into prison*," could only come from a writer whose mind was in the habit of considering John's imprisonment as perfectly notorious. The description of Andrew by the addition "Simon Peter's brother†," takes it for granted that Simon Peter was well known. His name had not been mentioned before. The evangelist's noticing‡ the prevailing misconstruction of a discourse, which Christ held with the beloved disciple, proves that the characters and the discourse were already public. And the observation which these instances afford, is of equal validity for the purpose of the present argument, whoever were the authors of the histories.

THESE *four* circumstances, first, the recognition of the account in its principal parts by a series of succeeding writers; secondly, the total absence of any account of the origin of

* John iii. 24. † Ibid. i. 40. ‡ Ibid. xxi. 24.

the

the religion ſubſtantially different from ours; thirdly, the early and extenſive prevalence of rites and inſtitutions, which reſult from our account; fourthly, our account bearing, in its conſtruction, proof that it is an account of facts, which were known and believed at the time, are ſufficient, I conceive, to ſupport an aſſurance, that the ſtory which we have now, is, in general, the ſtory which Chriſtians had at the beginning. I ſay *in general*; by which term I mean, that it is the ſame in its texture, and in its principal facts. For inſtance, I make no doubt, for the reaſons above ſtated, but that the reſurrection of the founder of the religion was always a part of the Chriſtian ſtory. Nor can a doubt of this remain upon the mind of any one, who reflects that the reſurrection is, in ſome form or other, aſſerted, referred to, or aſſumed, in every Chriſtian writing, of every deſcription, which hath come down to us.

And if our evidence ſtopped here, we ſhould have a ſtrong caſe to offer: for we ſhould have

have to alledge, that, in the reign of Tiberius Cæſar, a certain number of perſons ſet about an attempt of eſtabliſhing a new religion in the world; in the proſecution of which purpoſe, they voluntarily encountered great dangers, undertook great labours, ſuſtained great ſufferings, all *for* a miraculous ſtory which they publiſhed wherever they came; and that the reſurrection of a dead man, whom, during his life, they had followed and accompanied, was a conſtant part of this ſtory. I know nothing in the above ſtatement which can, with any appearance of reaſon, be diſputed: and I know nothing in the hiſtory of the human ſpecies ſimilar to it.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

There is ſatisfactory evidence, that many perſons, profeſſing to have been original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted, from the ſame motives, to new rules of conduct.

THAT the ſtory which we have now is, in the main, the ſtory which the apoſtles publiſhed, is, I think, nearly certain from the conſiderations which have been propoſed. But whether, when we come to the particulars and the detail of the narrative, the hiſtorical books of the New Teſtament be deſerving of credit as hiſtories, ſo that a fact ought to be accounted true becauſe it is found in them; or whether they are entitled to be conſidered as repreſenting the accounts,

which, true or falſe, the apoſtles publiſhed; whether their authority, in either of theſe views, can be truſted to, is a point which neceſſarily depends upon what we know of the books, and of their authors.

Now, in treating of this part of our argument, the firſt, and a moſt material, obſervation upon the ſubject is, that, ſuch was the ſituation of the authors to whom the four goſpels are aſcribed, that, if any one of the four be genuine, it is ſufficient for our purpoſe. The received author of the firſt was an original apoſtle and emiſſary of the religion. The received author of the ſecond was an inhabitant of Jeruſalem at the time, to whoſe houſe the apoſtles were wont to reſort, and himſelf an attendant upon one of the moſt eminent of that number. The received author of the third was a ſtated companion and fellow traveller of the moſt active of all the teachers of the religion, and in the courſe of his travels frequently in the ſociety of the original apoſtles. The received author of the fourth, as well as of the firſt,

was

was one of theſe apoſtles. No ſtronger evidence of the truth of a hiſtory can ariſe from the ſituation of the hiſtorian than what is here offered. The authors of all the hiſtories lived at the time and upon the ſpot. The authors of two of the hiſtories were preſent at many of the ſcenes which they deſcribe; eye-witneſſes of the facts, ear-witneſſes of the diſcourſes; writing from perſonal knowledge and recollection; and, what ſtrengthens their teſtimony, writing upon a ſubject in which their minds were deeply engaged, and in which, as they muſt have been very frequently repeating the accounts to others, the paſſages of the hiſtory would be kept continually alive in their memory. Whoever reads the goſpels (and they ought to be read for this particular purpoſe) will find in them not merely a general affirmation of miraculous powers, but detailed circumſtantial accounts of miracles, with ſpecifications of time, place, and perſons; and theſe accounts many and various. In the Goſpels, therefore, which bear the name of Matthew and John, theſe narratives, if they really proceeded

ceeded from theſe men, muſt either be true, as far as the fidelity of human recollection is uſually to be depended upon, that is, muſt be true in ſubſtance, and in their principal parts (which is ſufficient for the purpoſe of proving a ſupernatural agency), or they muſt be wilful and meditated falſehoods. Yet the writers who fabricated and uttered theſe falſehoods, if they be ſuch, are of the number of thoſe who, unleſs the whole contexture of the Chriſtian ſtory be a dream, ſacrificed their eaſe and ſafety in the cauſe, and for a purpoſe the moſt inconſiſtent that is poſſible with diſhoneſt intentions. They were villains for no end but to teach honeſty, and martyrs without the leaſt proſpect of honour or advantage.

The goſpels which bear the name of Mark and Luke, although not the narratives of eye-witneſſes, are, if genuine, removed from that only by one degree. They are the narratives of contemporary writers, of writers themſelves mixing with the buſineſs, one of the two probably living in the place

which was the principal ſcene of action, both living in habits of ſociety and correſpondence with thoſe who had been preſent at the tranſactions which they relate. The latter of them accordingly tells us (and with apparent ſincerity, becauſe he tells it without pretending to perſonal knowledge, and without claiming for his work greater authority than belonged to it), that the things, which were believed amongſt Chriſtians, came from thoſe who from the beginning were eye-witneſſes and miniſters of the word; that he had traced up accounts to their ſource; and that he was prepared to inſtruct his reader in the certainty of the things which he related*. Very few hiſtories lie ſo cloſe to their facts; very few hiſtorians are ſo nearly connected with the ſubject of their narrative,

* Why ſhould not the candid and modeſt preface of this hiſtorian be believed as well as that which Dion Caſſius prefixes to his Life of Commodus? "Theſe things and the following I write not from the report of others, but from my own knowledge and obſervation." I ſee no reaſon to doubt but that both paſſages deſcribe truly enough the ſituation of the authors.

or poſſeſs ſuch means of authentic information, as theſe.

The ſituation of the writers applies to the *truth* of the facts which they record. But at preſent we uſe their teſtimony to a point ſomewhat ſhort of this, namely, that the facts recorded in the goſpels, whether true or falſe, are the facts, and the ſort of facts, which the original preachers of the religion alledged. Strictly ſpeaking, I am concerned only to ſhew, that what the goſpels contain is the ſame as what the apoſtles preached. Now how ſtands the proof of this point? A ſet of men went about the world publiſhing a ſtory compoſed of miraculous accounts (for miraculous from the very nature and exigency of the caſe they muſt have been), and, upon the ſtrength of theſe accounts, called upon mankind to quit the religions in which they had been educated, and to take up, from thenceforth, a new ſyſtem of opinions, and new rules of action. What is more, in atteſtation of theſe accounts, that is, in ſupport of an inſtitution of which

theſe accounts were the foundation, the ſame men voluntarily expoſed themſelves to haraſſing and perpetual labours, dangers, and ſufferings. We want to know what theſe accounts were. We have the particulars, *i. e.* many particulars, from two of their own number. We have them from an attendant of one of the number, and who there is reaſon to believe was an inhabitant of Jeruſalem at the time. We have them from a fourth writer, who accompanied the moſt laborious miſſionary of the inſtitution in his travels; who, in the courſe of theſe travels, was frequently brought into the ſociety of the reſt; and who, let it be obſerved, begins his narrative by telling us, that he is about to relate the things which had been delivered by thoſe who were miniſters of the word and eye-witneſſes of the fact. I do not know what information can be more ſatisfactory than this. We may, perhaps, perceive the force and value of it more ſenſibly, if we reflect how *requiring* we ſhould have been if we had wanted it. Suppoſing it to be ſufficiently proved, that the religion, now

profeſſed amongſt us, owed its original to the preaching and miniſtry of a number of men, who, about eighteen centuries ago, ſet forth in the world a new ſyſtem of religious opinions, founded upon certain extraordinary things which they related of a wonderful perſon who had appeared in Judea: ſuppoſe it to be alſo ſufficiently proved, that, in the courſe and proſecution of their miniſtry, theſe men had ſubjected themſelves to extreme hardſhips, fatigue, and peril; but ſuppoſe the accounts which they publiſhed had not been committed to writing till ſome ages after their times, or at leaſt that no hiſtories, but what had been compoſed ſome ages afterwards, had reached our hands; we ſhould have ſaid, and with reaſon, that we were willing to believe theſe men under the circumſtances in which they delivered their teſtimony, but that we did not, at this day, know with ſufficient evidence what their teſtimony was. Had we received the particulars of it from any of their own number, from any of thoſe who lived and converſed with them, from any of their hearers, or even

from any of their contemporaries, we ſhould have had ſomething to rely upon. Now, if our books be genuine, we have all theſe. We have the very ſpecies of information which, as it appears to me, our imagination would have carved out for us, if it had been wanting.

But I have ſaid, that, if *any one* of the four goſpels be genuine, we have not only direct hiſtorical teſtimony to the point we contend for, but teſtimony which, ſo far as that point is concerned, cannot reaſonably be rejected. If the firſt goſpel was really written by Matthew, we have the narrative of one of the number from which to judge what were the miracles, and the kind of miracles, which the apoſtles attributed to Jeſus. Although, for argument's ſake, and only for argument's ſake, we ſhould allow that this goſpel had been erroneouſly aſcribed to Matthew, yet if the goſpel of St. John be genuine, the obſervation holds with no leſs ſtrength. Again, although the goſpels both of Matthew and John could be ſuppoſed to be ſpurious, yet, if the goſpel of St. Luke

Luke was truly the compoſition of that perſon, or of any perſon, be his name what it might, who was actually in the ſituation in which the author of that goſpel profeſſes himſelf to have been; or if the goſpel which bears the name of Mark really proceeded from him; we ſtill, even upon the loweſt ſuppoſition, poſſeſs the accounts of one writer at leaſt, who was not only contemporary with the apoſtles, but aſſociated with them in their miniſtry; which authority ſeems ſufficient, when the queſtion is ſimply what it was which theſe apoſtles advanced.

I think it material to have this well noticed. The New Teſtament contains a great number of diſtinct writings, the genuineneſs of any one of which is almoſt ſufficient to prove the truth of the religion: it contains, however, four diſtinct hiſtories, the genuineneſs of any one of which is perfectly ſufficient. If, therefore, we muſt be conſidered as encountering the riſk of error in aſſigning the authors of our books, we are entitled to the advantage of ſo many ſepa-

rate probabilities. And although it ſhould appear that ſome of the evangeliſts had ſeen and uſed each other's works, this diſcovery, whilſt it ſubtracts indeed from their character as teſtimonies ſtrictly independent, diminiſhes, I conceive, little, either their ſeparate authority, by which I mean the authority of any one that is genuine, or their mutual confirmation. For let the moſt diſadvantageous ſuppoſition poſſible be made concerning them; let it be allowed, what I ſhould have no great difficulty in admitting, that Mark compiled his hiſtory almoſt entirely from thoſe of Matthew and Luke; and let it alſo, for a moment, be ſuppoſed that theſe hiſtories were not, in fact, written by Matthew and Luke; yet, if it be true that Mark, a contemporary of the apoſtles, living in habits of ſociety with the apoſtles, a fellow-traveller and fellow-labourer with ſome of them; if, I ſay, it be true that this perſon made the compilation, it follows, that the writings from which he made it exiſted in the times of the apoſtles, and not only ſo, but that they were then in ſuch eſteem and credit

credit that a companion of the apoſtles formed a hiſtory out of them. Let the goſpel of Mark be called an epitome of that of Matthew; if a perſon, in the ſituation in which Mark is deſcribed to have been, actually made the epitome, it affords the ſtrongeſt poſſible atteſtation to the character of the original.

Again, paralleliſms in ſentences, in words, and in the order of words, have been traced out between the goſpel of Matthew and that of Luke; which concurrence cannot eaſily be explained otherwiſe than by ſuppoſing, either that Luke had conſulted Matthew's hiſtory, or, what appears to me in no wiſe incredible, that minutes of ſome of Chriſt's diſcourſes, as well as brief memoirs of ſome paſſages of his life, had been committed to writing at the time, and that ſuch written accounts had by both authors been occaſionally admitted into their hiſtories. Either ſuppoſition is perfectly conſiſtent with the acknowledged formation of St. Luke's narrative, who profeſſes not to write as an eye-witneſs, but to have inveſtigated

gated the original of every account which he delivers; in other words, to have collected them from ſuch documents and teſtimonies, as he, who had the beſt opportunities of making enquiries, judged to be authentic. Therefore, allowing that this writer alſo, in ſome inſtances, borrowed from the goſpel which we call Matthew's, and once more allowing, for the ſake of ſtating the argument, that that goſpel was not the production of the author to whom we aſcribe it, yet ſtill we have, in St. Luke's goſpel, a hiſtory given by a writer immediately connected with the tranſaction, with the witneſſes of it, with the perſons engaged in it, and compoſed from materials which that perſon, thus ſituated, deemed to be ſafe ſources of intelligence: in other words, whatever ſuppoſition be made concerning any or all the other goſpels, if St. Luke's goſpel be genuine, we have *in it* a credible evidence of the point which we maintain.

The goſpel according to St. John appears to be, and is on all hands allowed to be, an inde-

independent teſtimony, ſtrictly and properly ſo called. Notwithſtanding, therefore, any connection, or ſuppoſed connection, between ſome of the goſpels, I again repeat, what I before ſaid, that, if any one of the four be genuine, we have, in that one, ſtrong reaſon from the character and ſituation of the writer to believe, that we poſſeſs the accounts which the original emiſſaries of the religion delivered.

II. In treating of the written evidences of Chriſtianity, next to their ſeparate, we are to conſider their aggregate authority. Now, there is in the evangelic hiſtory a cumulation of teſtimony which belongs hardly to any other hiſtory, but which our habitual mode of reading the ſcriptures ſometimes cauſes us to overlook. When a paſſage, in any wiſe relating to the hiſtory of Chriſt, is read to us out of the epiſtle of Clemens Romanus, the epiſtles of Ignatius, of Polycarp, or from any other writing of that age, we are immediately ſenſible of the confirmation which it affords to the ſcripture account.

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Here is a new witneſs. Now if we had been accuſtomed to read the goſpel of Matthew alone, and had known that of Luke only as the generality of Chriſtians know the writings of the apoſtolical fathers, that is, had known that ſuch a writing was extant and acknowledged; when we came, for the firſt time, to look into what it contained, and found many of the facts which Matthew recorded, recorded alſo there, many other facts of a ſimilar nature added, and throughout the whole work the ſame general ſeries of tranſactions ſtated, and the ſame general character of the perſon who was the ſubject of the hiſtory preſerved, I apprehend that we ſhould feel our minds ſtrongly impreſſed by this diſcovery of freſh evidence. We ſhould feel a renewal of the ſame ſentiment in firſt reading the goſpel of St. John. That of St. Mark perhaps would ſtrike us as an abridgement of the hiſtory with which we were already acquainted; but we ſhould naturally reflect, that if that hiſtory was abridged by ſuch a perſon as Mark, or by any perſon of ſo early an age, it afforded one

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of the higheſt poſſible atteſtations to the value of the work. This ſucceſſive diſcloſure of proof would leave us aſſured, that there muſt have been at leaſt ſome reality in a ſtory which, not one, but many, had taken in hand to commit to writing. The very exiſtence of four ſeparate hiſtories would ſatisfy us that the ſubject had a foundation; and when, amidſt the variety which the different information of the different writers had ſupplied to their accounts, or which their different choice and judgment in ſelecting their materials had produced, we obſerved many facts to ſtand the ſame in all; of theſe facts, at leaſt, we ſhould conclude, that they were fixed in their credit and publicity. If, after this, we ſhould come to the knowledge of a diſtinct hiſtory, and that alſo of the ſame age with the reſt, taking up the ſubject where the others had left it, and carrying on a narrative of the effects produced in the world by the extraordinary cauſes of which we had already been informed, and which effects ſubſiſt at this day, we ſhould think the reality of the original ſtory in no little

little degree eſtabliſhed by this ſupplement. If ſubſequent enquiries ſhould bring to our knowledge, one after another, letters written by ſome of the principal agents in the buſineſs, upon the buſineſs, and during the time of their activity and concern in it, aſſuming all along and recognizing the original ſtory, agitating the queſtions that aroſe out of it, preſſing the obligations which reſulted from it, giving advice and directions to thoſe who acted upon it, I conceive that we ſhould find, in every one of theſe, a ſtill further ſupport to the concluſion we had formed. At preſent the weight of this ſucceſſive confirmation is, in a great meaſure, unperceived by us. The evidence does not appear to us what it is; for, being from our infancy accuſtomed to regard the New Teſtament as one book, we ſee in it only one teſtimony. The whole occurs to us as a ſingle evidence; and its different parts, not as diſtinct atteſtations, but as different portions only of the ſame. Yet in this conception of the ſubject we are certainly miſtaken; for the very diſcrepancies amongſt the

the ſeveral documents which form our volume, prove, if all other proof were wanting, that in their original compoſition they were ſeparate, and moſt of them independent productions.

If we diſpoſe our ideas in a different order, the matter ſtands thus:—Whilſt the tranſaction was recent, and the original witneſſes were at hand to relate it; and whilſt the apoſtles were buſied in preaching and travelling, in collecting diſciples, in forming and regulating ſocieties of converts, in ſupporting themſelves againſt oppoſition; whilſt they exerciſed their miniſtry under the haraſſings of frequent perſecution, and in a ſtate of almoſt continual alarm, it is not probable that, in this engaged, anxious, and unſettled condition of life, they would think immediately of writing hiſtories for the information of the public or of poſterity*. But

* This thought occurred to Euſebius—"Nor were the Apoſtles of Chriſt greatly concerned about the writing of books, being engaged in a more excellent miniſtry,

But it is very probable, that emergencies might draw from ſome of them, occaſional letters upon the ſubject of their miſſion, to converts, or to ſocieties of converts, with which they were connected; or that they might addreſs written diſcourſes and exhortations to the diſciples of the inſtitution at large, which would be received and read with a reſpect proportioned to the character of the writer. Accounts in the mean time would get abroad, of the extraordinary things that had been paſſing, written with different degrees of information and correctneſs. The extenſion of the Chriſtian ſociety, which could no longer be inſtructed by a perſonal intercourſe with the apoſtles, and the poſſible circulation of imperfect or erroneous narratives, would ſoon teach ſome amongſt them the expediency of ſending forth authentic memoirs of the life and doctrine of their maſter. When accounts appeared, au-

ſtry, which is above all human power." Eccleſ. Hiſt. l. iii. c. 24. The ſame conſideration accounts alſo for the paucity of Chriſtian writings in the firſt century of its æra.

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thorized by the name, and credit, and ſituation of the writers, recommended or recognized by the apoſtles and firſt preachers of the religion, or found to coincide with what the apoſtles and firſt preachers of the religion had taught, other accounts would fall into diſuſe and neglect; whilſt theſe, maintaining their reputation (as, if genuine and well founded, they would do) under the teſt of time, enquiry, and contradiction, might be expected to make their way into the hands of Chriſtians of all countries of the world.

This ſeems the natural progreſs of the buſineſs; and with this the records in our poſſeſſion, and the evidence concerning them, correſpond. We have remaining, in the firſt place, many letters of the kind above deſcribed, which have been preſerved with a care and fidelity anſwering to the reſpect with which we may ſuppoſe that ſuch letters would be received. But as theſe letters were not written to prove the truth of the Chriſtian religion, in the ſenſe in which we regard that queſtion; nor to convey informa-

tion of facts, of which thoſe to whom the letters were written had been previouſly informed: we are not to look in them for any thing more than incidental alluſions to the Chriſtian hiſtory. We are able, however, to gather from theſe documents various particular atteſtations which have been already enumerated; and this is a ſpecies of written evidence, as far as it goes, in the higheſt degree ſatisfactory, and in point of time perhaps the firſt. But for our more circumſtantial information we have, in the next place, five direct *hiſtories*, bearing the names of perſons acquainted, by their ſituation, with the truth of what they relate, and three of them purporting, in the very body of the narrative, to be written by ſuch perſons: of which books we know that ſome were in the hands of thoſe who were contemporaries of the apoſtles, and that, in the age immediately poſterior to that, they were in the hands, we may ſay, of every one, and received by Chriſtians with ſo much reſpect and deference, as to be conſtantly quoted and referred to by them without any doubt of the truth

truth of their accounts. They were treated as ſuch hiſtories, proceeding from ſuch authorities, might expect to be treated. In the preface to one of our hiſtories we have intimations left us of the exiſtence of ſome ancient accounts which are now loſt. There is nothing in this circumſtance that can ſurpriſe us. It was to be expected from the magnitude and novelty of the occaſion, that ſuch accounts would *ſwarm*. When better accounts came forth, theſe died away. Our preſent hiſtories ſuperſeded others. They ſoon acquired a character and eſtabliſhed a reputation which does not appear to have belonged to any other: that, at leaſt, can be proved concerning them, which cannot be proved concerning any other.

But to return to the point which led to theſe reflections. By conſidering our records in either of the two views in which we have repreſented them, we ſhall perceive that we poſſeſs a *collection of proofs*, and not a naked or ſolitary teſtimony; and that the written evidence is of ſuch a kind, and comes

to us in ſuch a ſtate, as the natural order and progreſs of things, in the infancy of the inſtitution, might be expected to produce.

Thirdly; The genuineneſs of the hiſtorical books of the New Teſtament is undoubtedly a point of importance, becauſe the ſtrength of their evidence is augmented by our knowledge of the ſituation of their authors, their relation to the ſubject, and the part which they ſuſtained in the tranſaction; and the teſtimonies which we are able to produce, compoſe a firm ground of perſuaſion that the goſpels were written by the perſons whoſe names they bear. Nevertheleſs, I muſt be allowed to ſtate, that to the argument which I am endeavouring to maintain, this point is not eſſential; I mean, ſo eſſential as that the fate of the argument depends upon it. The queſtion before us is, whether the goſpels exhibit the ſtory which the apoſtles and firſt emiſſaries of the religion publiſhed, and *for* which they acted and ſuffered in the manner in which, for ſome miraculous ſtory or other, they did act and ſuffer.

ſuffer. Now let us ſuppoſe that we poſſeſſed no other information concerning theſe books than that they were written by early diſciples of Chriſtianity; that they were known and read during the time, or near the time, of the original apoſtles of the religion; that by Chriſtians whom the apoſtles inſtructed, by ſocieties of Chriſtians which the apoſtles founded, theſe books were *received* (by which term "received" I mean that they were believed to contain authentic accounts of the tranſaction upon which the religion reſted, and accounts which were accordingly uſed, repeated, and relied upon), this reception would be a valid proof that theſe books, whoever were the authors of them, muſt have accorded with what the apoſtles taught. A reception by the firſt race of Chriſtians is evidence that they agreed with what the firſt teachers of the religion delivered. In particular, if they had not agreed with what the apoſtles themſelves preached, how could they have gained credit in churches and ſocieties which the apoſtles eſtabliſhed?

Now the fact of their early exiſtence, and not only of their exiſtence but their reputation, is made out by ſome ancient teſtimonies which do not happen to ſpecify the names of the writers: add to which, what hath been already hinted, that two out of the four goſpels contain averments in the body of the hiſtory, which, though they do not diſcloſe the names, fix the time and ſituation of the authors, viz. that one was written by an eye-witneſs of the ſufferings of Chriſt, the other by a contemporary of the apoſtles. In the goſpel of St. John, (xix. 35.) after deſcribing the crucifixion, with the particular circumſtance of piercing Chriſt's ſide with a ſpear, the hiſtorian adds, as for himſelf, "and he that ſaw it bear record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he ſaith true, that ye might believe." Again, (xxi. 24.) after relating a converſation which paſſed between Peter and the diſciple, as it is there expreſſed, whom Jeſus loved, it is added, "this is the diſciple which teſtifieth of theſe things and wrote theſe things." This teſtimony, let it be remarked,

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is not the leſs worthy of regard, becauſe it is in one view imperfect. The name is not mentioned; which, if a fraudulent purpoſe had been intended, would have been done. The third of our preſent goſpels purports to have been written by the perſon who wrote the Acts of the Apoſtles; in which latter hiſtory, or rather latter part of the ſame hiſtory, the author, by uſing in various places the firſt perſon plural, declares himſelf to have been a contemporary of all, and a companion of one of the original preachers of the religion.

CHAP. IX.

There is ſatisfactory evidence, that many perſons, profeſſing to be original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings, voluntarily undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted, from the ſame motives, to new rules of conduct.

"Of the Authenticity of the Scriptures."

NOT forgetting, therefore, what credit is due to the evangelic hiſtory, ſuppoſing even any one of the four goſpels to be genuine; what credit is due to the goſpels, even ſuppoſing nothing to be known concerning them but that they were written by early diſciples of the religion, and received with deference by early Chriſtian churches; more eſpecially not forgetting what credit is due to the New Teſtament in its capacity of *cumulative* evidence; we now proceed to ſtate

ſtate the proper and diſtinct proofs, which ſhow not only the general value of theſe records, but their ſpecific authority, and the high probability there is that they actually came from the perſons whoſe names they bear.

There are, however, a few preliminary reflections, by which we may draw up with more regularity to the propoſitions, upon which the cloſe and particular diſcuſſion of the ſubject depends. Of which nature are the following:

I. We are able to produce a great number of ancient *manuſcripts*, found in many different countries, and in countries widely diſtant from each other, all of them anterior to the art of printing, ſome certainly ſeven or eight hundred years old, and ſome which have been preſerved probably above a thouſand years*. We have alſo many ancient

* The Alexandrian manuſcript, now in the Britiſh Muſeum, was written probably in the fourth or fifth century.

verſions

verſions of theſe books, and ſome of them into languages which are not at preſent, nor for many ages have been, ſpoken in any part of the world. The exiſtence of theſe manuſcripts and verſions proves that the ſcriptures were not the production of any modern contrivance. It does away alſo the uncertainty which hangs over ſuch publications as the works, real or pretended, of Oſſian and Rowley, in which the editors are challenged to produce their manuſcripts, and to ſhow where they obtained their copies. The number of manuſcripts, far exceeding thoſe of any other book, and their wide diſperſion, affords an argument, in ſome meaſure, to the ſenſes, that the ſcriptures anciently, in like manner as at this day, were more read and ſought after than any other books, and that alſo in many different countries. The greateſt part of ſpurious Chriſtian writings are utterly loſt, the reſt preſerved by ſome ſingle manuſcript. There is weight alſo in Dr. Bentley's obſervation, that the New Teſtament has ſuffered leſs injury by the errors of tranſcribers than the

works

works of any profane author of the ſame ſize and antiquity; that is, there never was any writing in the preſervation and purity of which the world was ſo intereſted or ſo careful.

II. An argument of great weight with thoſe who are judges of the proofs upon which it is founded, and capable, through their teſtimony, of being addreſſed to every underſtanding, is that which ariſes from the ſtyle and language of the New Teſtament. It is juſt ſuch a language as might be expected from the apoſtles, from perſons of their age and in their ſituation, and from no other perſons. It is the ſtyle neither of claſſic authors nor of the ancient Chriſtian fathers, but Greek coming from men of Hebrew origin; abounding, that is with Hebraic and Syriac idioms, ſuch as would naturally be found in the writings of men who uſed a language ſpoken indeed where they lived, but not the common dialect of the country. This happy peculiarity is a ſtrong proof of the genuineneſs of theſe writings; for who ſhould

ſhould forge them? The Chriſtian fathers were for the moſt part totally ignorant of Hebrew, and therefore were not likely to inſert Hebraiſms and Syriaſms into their writings. The few who had a knowledge of the Hebrew, as Juſtin Martyr, Origen, and Epiphanius, wrote in a language which bears no reſemblance to that of the New Teſtament. The Nazarenes, who underſtood Hebrew, uſed chiefly, perhaps almoſt entirely, the goſpel of St. Matthew, and therefore cannot be ſuſpected of forging the reſt of the ſacred writings. The argument, at any rate, proves the antiquity of theſe books; that they belonged to the age of the apoſtles; that they could be compoſed indeed in no other *.

III. Why ſhould we queſtion the genuineneſs of theſe books? Is it for that they contain accounts of ſupernatural events? I apprehend that this, at the bottom, is the

* See this argument ſtated more at large in Michaelis's Introduction (Marſh's tranſlation), vol. I. c. ii. ſect. 10. from which theſe obſervations are taken.

real,

real, though ſecret, cauſe of our heſitation about them; for had the writings inſcribed with the names of Matthew and John related nothing but ordinary hiſtory, there would have been no more doubt whether theſe writings were theirs, than there is concerning the acknowledged works of Joſephus or Philo, that is, there would have been no doubt at all. Now it ought to be conſidered that this reaſon, however it may apply to the credit which is given to a writer's judgment or veracity, affects the queſtion of genuineneſs very indirectly. The works of Bede exhibit many wonderful relations; but who for that reaſon doubts that they were written by Bede? The ſame of a multitude of other authors. To which may be added, that we aſk no more for our books than what we allow to other books in ſome ſort ſimilar to ours. We do not deny the genuineneſs of the Koran. We admit that the hiſtory of Apolonius Tyanæus, purporting to be written by Philoſtratus, was really written by Philoſtratus.

IV. If it had been an eaſy thing in the early times of the inſtitution to have forged Chriſtian writings, and to have obtained currency and reception to the forgeries, we ſhould have had many appearing in the name of Chriſt himſelf. No writings would have been received with ſo much avidity and reſpect as theſe; conſequently none afforded ſo great temptation to forgery. Yet have we heard but of one attempt of this ſort deſerving of the ſmalleſt notice, *that* in a piece of a very few lines, and ſo far from ſucceeding, I mean, from obtaining acceptance and reputation, or an acceptance and reputation in any wiſe ſimilar to that which can be proved to have attended the books of the New Teſtament, that it is not ſo much as mentioned by any writer of the three firſt centuries. The learned reader need not be informed that I mean the epiſtle of Chriſt to Abgarus, King of Edeſſa, found at preſent in the work of Euſebius*, as a piece acknowledged by him, though not without conſiderable doubt whether the whole paſſage

* Hiſt. Eccl. l. i. c. 15.

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be not an interpolation, as it is moſt certain, that after the publication of Euſebius's work, this epiſtle was univerſally rejected*.

V. If the aſcription of the goſpels to their reſpective authors had been arbitrary or conjectural, they would have been aſcribed to more eminent men. This obſervation holds concerning the three firſt goſpels, the reputed authors of which were enabled, by their ſituation, to obtain true intelligence, and were likely to deliver an honeſt account of

* Auguſtin. A. D. 395, (De Conſenſ. Evang. c. 34.) had *heard* that the Pagans pretended to be poſſeſſed of an epiſtle from Chriſt to Peter and Paul, but he had never ſeen it, and appears to doubt of the exiſtence of any ſuch piece, either genuine or ſpurious. No other ancient writer mentions it. He alſo, and he alone, notices, and that in order to condemn it, an epiſtle aſcribed to Chriſt by the Manichees, A. D. 270, and a ſhort hymn attributed to him by the Priſcillianiſts, A. D. 378, (cont. Fauſt. Man. lib. xxviii. c. 4.) The lateneſs of the writer who notices theſe things, the manner in which he notices them, and above all, the ſilence of every preceding writer, render them unworthy of conſideration.

what

what they knew, but were perſons not diſtinguiſhed in the hiſtory by extraordinary marks of notice or commendation. Of the apoſtles, I hardly know any one of whom leſs is ſaid than of Matthew; or of whom the little that is ſaid, is leſs calculated to magnify his character. Of Mark nothing is ſaid in the Goſpels; and what is ſaid of any perſon of that name in the Acts, and in the Epiſtles, in no part beſtows praiſe or eminence upon him. The name of Luke is mentioned only in St. Paul's Epiſtles*, and that very tranſiently. The judgment, therefore, which aſſigned theſe writings to theſe authors, proceeded, it may be preſumed, upon proper knowledge and evidence, and not upon a voluntary choice of names.

VI. Chriſtian writers and Chriſtian churches appear to have ſoon arrived at a very general agreement upon the ſubject, and that without the interpoſition of any public authority. When the diverſity of opinion, which prevailed and prevails among Chriſ-

* Col. iv. 14. 2 Tim. iv. 11. Philem. 24.

tians

tians in other points, is conſidered, their concurrence in the canon of ſcripture is remarkable, and of great weight, eſpecially as it ſeems to have been the reſult of private and free enquiry. We have no knowledge of any interference of authority in the queſtion before the council of Laodicea in the year 363. Probably the decree of this council rather declared than regulated the public judgement, or, more properly ſpeaking, the judgement of ſome neighbouring churches; the council itſelf conſiſting of no more than thirty or forty biſhops of Lydia and the adjoining countries *. Nor does its authority ſeem to have extended farther; for we find numerous Chriſtian writers, after this time, diſcuſſing the queſtion, "what books were entitled to be received as ſcripture," with great freedom, upon proper grounds of evidence, and without any reference to the deciſion at Laodicea.

* Lardner's Cred. vol. viii. p. 291 et ſeq.

THESE conſiderations are not to be neglected: but of an argument concerning the genuineneſs of ancient writings, the ſubſtance undoubtedly and ſtrength is ancient teſtimony.

This teſtimony it is neceſſary to exhibit ſomewhat in detail; for when Chriſtian advocates merely tell us, that we have the ſame reaſon for believing the Goſpels to be written by the evangeliſts, whoſe names they bear, as we have for believing the Commentaries to be Ceſar's, the Æneid Virgil's, or the Orations Cicero's, they content themſelves with an imperfect repreſentation. They ſtate nothing more than what is true, but they do not ſtate the truth correctly. In the number, variety, and early date of our teſtimonies,

teſtimonies, we far exceed all other ancient books. For one, which the moſt celebrated work of the moſt celebrated Greek or Roman writer can alledge, we produce many. But then it is more requiſite in our books, than in theirs, to ſeparate and diſtinguiſh them from ſpurious competitors. The reſult, I am convinced, will be ſatisfactory to every fair enquirer; but this circumſtance renders an enquiry neceſſary.

In a work, however, like the preſent, there is a difficulty in finding a place for evidence of this kind. To purſue the detail of proofs throughout, would be to tranſcribe a great part of Dr. Lardner's eleven octavo volumes; to leave the argument without proofs, is to leave it without effect; for the perſuaſion produced by this ſpecies of evidence depends upon a view and induction of the particulars which compoſe it.

The method which I propoſe to myſelf is, firſt, to place before the reader, in one view, the propoſitions which compriſe the

ſeveral heads of our teſtimony, and afterwards, to repeat the ſame propoſitions in ſo many diſtinct ſections, with the neceſſary authorities ſubjoined to each *.

The following, then, are the allegations upon the ſubject, which are capable of being eſtabliſhed by proof:

I. That the hiſtorical books of the New Teſtament, meaning thereby the four Goſpels and the Acts of the Apoſtles, are quoted, or alluded to, by a ſeries of Chriſtian writers, beginning with thoſe who were contemporary with the apoſtles, or who immediately followed them, and proceeding in cloſe and regular ſucceſſion from their time to the preſent.

II. That when they are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted or alluded to with peculiar reſpect, as books *ſui generis*; as poſ-

* The reader, when he has the propoſitions before him, will obſerve that the argument, if he ſhould omit the ſections, proceeds connectedly from this point.

ſeſſing

ſeſſing an authority which belonged to no other books, and as concluſive in all queſtions and controverſies amongſt Chriſtians.

III. That they were, in very early times, collected into a diſtinct volume.

IV. That they were diſtinguiſhed by appropriate names and titles of reſpect.

V. That they were publicly read and expounded in the religious aſſemblies of the early Chriſtians.

VI. That commentaries were written upon them, harmonies formed out of them, different copies carefully collated, and verſions of them made into different languages.

VII. That they were received by Chriſtians of different ſects, by many heretics as well as catholics, and uſually appealed to by both ſides in the controverſies which aroſe in thoſe days.

VIII. That the four Goſpels, the Acts of the Apoſtles, thirteen Epiſtles of St. Paul, the firſt Epiſtle of John, and the firſt of Peter, were received, without doubt, by thoſe who doubted concerning the other books which are included in our preſent canon.

IX. That the Goſpels were attacked by the early adverſaries of Chriſtianity, as books containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded.

X. That formal catalogues of authentic ſcriptures were publiſhed; in all which our preſent ſacred hiſtories were included.

XI. That theſe propoſitions cannot be affirmed of any other books, claiming to be books of ſcripture; by which are meant thoſe books, which are commonly called apocryphal books of the New Teſtament.

SECT.

SECT. I.

The hiſtorical books of the New Teſtament, meaning thereby the four Goſpels and the Acts of the Apoſtles, are quoted, or alluded to, by a ſeries of Chriſtian writers, beginning with thoſe who were contemporary with the Apoſtles, or who immediately followed them, and proceeding in cloſe and regular ſucceſſion from their time to the preſent.

THE medium of proof ſtated in this propoſition is, of all others, the moſt unqueſtionable, the leaſt liable to any practices of fraud, and is not diminiſhed by the lapſe of ages. Biſhop Burnet, in the Hiſtory of his own Times, inſerts various extracts from Lord Clarendon's Hiſtory. *One* ſuch inſertion is a proof, that Lord Clarendon's Hiſtory was extant at the time when Biſhop Burnet wrote, that it had been read by Biſhop

Burnet, that it was received by Biſhop Burnet as a work of Lord Clarendon's, and alſo regarded by him as an authentic account of the tranſactions which it relates; and it will be a proof of theſe points a thouſand years hence, or as long as the books exiſt. Quintilian having quoted as Cicero's *, that well known trait of diſſembled vanity,

"Si quid eſt in me ingenii, Judices, quod ſentio quam ſit exiguum—"

the quotation would be ſtrong evidence, were there any doubt, that the oration, which opens with this addreſs, actually came from Cicero's pen. Theſe inſtances, however ſimple, may ſerve to point out to a reader, who is little accuſtomed to ſuch reſearches, the nature and value of the argument.

The teſtimonies which we have to bring forward under this propoſition are the following.

I. There is extant an epiſtle aſcribed to

* Quint. lib. xi. c. 1.

Barnabas,

Barnabas*, the companion of Paul. It is quoted as the epiſtle of Barnabas by Clement of Alexándria, A. D. 194; by Origen, A. D. 230. It is mentioned by Euſebius, A. D. 315, and by Jerome, A. D. 392, as an ancient work in their time, bearing the name of Barnabas, and as well known and read amongſt Chriſtians, though not accounted a part of Scripture. It purports to have been written ſoon after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, during the calamities which followed that diſaſter; and it bears the character of the age to which it profeſſes to belong.

In this epiſtle appears the following remarkable paſſage:—"Let us, therefore, beware leſt it come upon us, *as it is written*, There are many called, few choſen." From the expreſſion, "as it is written," we infer with certainty, that, at the time when the

* Lardner's Cred. ed. 1755, vol. i. p. 23 et ſeq. The reader will obſerve from the references, that the materials of theſe ſections are almoſt entirely extracted from Dr. Lardner's work—my office conſiſted in arrangement and ſelection.

author

author of this epiſtle lived, there was a book extant, well known to Chriſtians, and of authority amongſt them, containing theſe words—"Many are called, few choſen." Such a book is our preſent Goſpel of St. Matthew, in which this text is twice found*, and is found in no other book now known. There is a farther obſervation to be made upon the terms of the quotation. The writer of the epiſtle was a Jew. The phraſe "it is written" was the very form in which the Jews quoted their ſcriptures. It is not probable therefore, that he would have uſed this phraſe, and without qualification, of any books but what had acquired a kind of ſcriptural authority. If the paſſage remarked in this ancient writing had been found in one of St. Paul's epiſtles, it would have been eſteemed by every one a high teſtimony to St. Matthew's goſpel. It ought, therefore, to be remembered, that the writing in which it *is* found was probably by very few years poſterior to thoſe of St. Paul.

* Mat. xx. 16. xxii. 14.

Beſide

Beſide this paſſage, there are alſo in the epiſtle before us ſeveral others, in which the ſentiment is the ſame with what we meet with in St. Matthew's goſpel, and two or three in which we recognize the ſame words. In particular, the author of the epiſtle repeats the precept, "Give to every one that aſketh thee*," and ſaith that Chriſt choſe as his apoſtles, who were to preach the goſpel, men who were great ſinners, that he might ſhew that he came "not to call the righteous, but ſinners, to repentance†."

II. We are in poſſeſſion of an epiſtle written by Clement, Biſhop of Rome‡, whom ancient writers, without any doubt or ſcruple, aſſert to have been the Clement whom St. Paul mentions, Phil. iv. 3, "with *Clement* alſo, and other my fellow labourers, whoſe names are in the book of life." This epiſtle is ſpoken of by the ancients as an epiſtle acknowledged by all; and, as Irenæus

* Mat. v. 42. † Ib. ix. 13.
‡ Lardner's Cred. vol i. p. 62 et ſeq.

well

well repreſents its value, " written by Clement, who had ſeen the bleſſed apoſtles and converſed with them, who had the preaching of the apoſtles ſtill ſounding in his ears, and their traditions before his eyes." It is addreſſed to the church of Corinth; and what alone may ſeem almoſt deciſive of its authenticity, Dionyſius, Biſhop of Corinth, about the year 170, *i. e.* about eighty or ninety years after the epiſtle was written, bears witneſs, " that it had been wont to be read in that church from ancient times."

This epiſtle affords, amongſt others, the following valuable paſſages:—" Eſpecially remembering the words of the Lord Jeſus which he ſpake, teaching gentleneſs and long ſuffering; for thus he ſaid*: Be ye

* " Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy." Mat. v. 7.—" Forgive, and ye ſhall be forgiven; give, and it ſhall be given unto you." Luke vi. 37, 38.—" Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye ſhall be judged, and with what meaſure ye mete, it ſhall be meaſured to you again." Mat. vii. 2.

merciful,

merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven unto you; as you do, ſo ſhall it be done unto you; as you give, ſo ſhall it be given unto you; as ye judge, ſo ſhall ye be judged; as ye ſhew kindneſs, ſo ſhall kindneſs be ſhewn unto you; with what meaſure ye mete, with the ſame it ſhall be meaſured to you. By this command, and by theſe rules, let us eſtabliſh ourſelves, that we may always walk obediently to his holy words."

Again, "Remember the words of the Lord Jeſus, for he ſaid, Wo to that man by whom offences come; it were better for him that he had not been born, than that he ſhould offend one of my elect; it were better for him that a mill-ſtone ſhould be tied about his neck, and that he ſhould be drowned in the ſea, than that he ſhould offend one of my little ones *."

In

* Mat. xviii. 6. "But whoſo ſhall offend one of theſe little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-ſtone were hanged about his neck, and that he were caſt into the ſea." The latter part of the paſ-

ſage

In both theſe paſſages we perceive the high reſpect paid to the words of Chriſt as recorded by the evangeliſts: "*Remember* the words of the Lord Jeſus—by this command and by theſe rules let us eſtabliſh ourſelves, that we may always walk obediently to his holy words." We perceive alſo in Clement a total unconſciouſneſs of doubt, whether theſe were the real words of Chriſt, which are read as ſuch in the goſpels. This obſervation indeed belongs to the whole ſeries of teſtimony, and eſpecially to the moſt ancient part of it. Whenever any thing now read in the goſpels, is met with in an early Chriſtian writing, it is always obſerved to ſtand there as acknowledged truth, *i. e.* to be introduced without heſitation, doubt, or apology. It is to be obſerved alſo, that as this epiſtle was written in the name of the church of Rome, and addreſſed to the church of Corinth, it ought to be taken as exhibiting

ſage in Clement agrees more exactly with Luke xvii. 2. "It were better for him that a mill-ſtone were hanged about his neck, and he caſt into the ſea, than that he ſhould offend one of theſe little ones."

the

the judgement not only of Clement, who drew up the letter, but of theſe churches themſelves, at leaſt as to the authority of the books referred to.

It may be ſaid, that, as Clement hath not uſed words of quotation, it is not certain that he refers to any book whatever. The words of Chriſt, which he has put down, he might himſelf have heard from the apoſtles, or might have received through the ordinary medium of oral tradition. This hath been ſaid; but that no ſuch inference can be drawn from the abſence of words of quotation is proved by the three following conſiderations:—Firſt, that Clement, in the very ſame manner, namely, without any mark of reference, uſes a paſſage now found in the epiſtle to the Romans*; which paſſage, from the peculiarity of the words which compoſe it, and from their order, it is manifeſt that he muſt have taken from the book. The ſame remark may be repeated of ſome

* Rom. i. 29.

very ſingular ſentiments in the epiſtle to the Hebrews. Secondly, that there are many ſentences of St. Paul's firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians ſtanding in Clement's epiſtle without any ſign of quotation, which yet certainly are quotations; becauſe it appears that Clement had St. Paul's epiſtle before him, inaſmuch as in one place he mentions it in terms too expreſs to leave us in any doubt—"Take into your hands the epiſtle of the bleſſed apoſtle Paul." Thirdly, that this method of adopting words of ſcripture, without reference or acknowledgement, was, as will appear in the ſequel, a method in general uſe amongſt the moſt ancient Chriſtian writers. Theſe analogies not only repel the objection, but caſt the preſumption on the other ſide; and afford a conſiderable degree of poſitive proof, that the words in queſtion have been borrowed from the places of ſcripture in which we now find them.

But take it if you will the other way, that Clement had heard theſe words from the apoſtles or firſt teachers of Chriſtianity; with reſpect

reſpect to the preciſe point of our argument, viz. that the ſcriptures contain what the apoſtles taught, this ſuppoſition may ſerve almoſt as well.

III. Near the concluſion of the epiſtle to the Romans, St. Paul, amongſt others, ſends the following ſalutation: "Salute Aſyncritus, Phlegon, *Hermas*, Patrobus, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them."

Of Hermas, who appears in this catalogue of Roman Chriſtians as contemporary with St. Paul, a book bearing the name, and it is moſt probable rightly, is ſtill remaining. It is called the Shepherd or Paſtor of Hermas*. Its antiquity is inconteſtable, from the quotations of it in Irenæus, A. D. 178, Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194, Tertullian, A. D. 200, Origen, A. D. 230. The notes of time extant in the epiſtle itſelf agree with its title, and with the teſtimonies concerning it, for it purports to have been written during the lifetime of Clement.

* Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 111.

In this piece are tacit alluſions to St. Matthew's, St. Luke's, and St. John's goſpels, that is to ſay, there are applications of thoughts and expreſſions found in theſe goſpels, without citing the place or writer from which they were taken. In this form appear in Hermas the confeſſing and denying of Chriſt*; the parable of the ſeed ſown†; the compariſon of Chriſt's diſciples to little children; the ſaying, "he that putteth away his wife and marrieth another, committeth adultery‡; the ſingular expreſſion, "having received all power from his father," in probable alluſion to Mat. xxviii. 18. and Chriſt being the "gate," or only way of coming "to God," in plain alluſion to John xiv. 6.—x. 7. 9. There is alſo a probable alluſion to Acts v. 32.

This piece is the repreſentation of a viſion, and has by many been accounted a weak and fanciful performance. I therefore obſerve, that the character of the writing has

* Mat. x. 32, 33. or Luke xii. 8, 9.

† Mat. xiii. 3. or Luke viii. 5.

‡ Luke xvi. 18.

little

little to do with the purpoſe for which we adduce it. It is the age in which it was compoſed that gives the value to its teſtimony.

IV. Ignatius, as it is teſtified by ancient Chriſtian writers, became Biſhop of Antioch about thirty-ſeven years after Chriſt's aſcenſion; and therefore, from his time, and place, and ſtation, it is probable that he had known and converſed with many of the apoſtles. Epiſtles of Ignatius are referred to by Polycarp his contemporary. Paſſages found in the epiſtles now extant under his name are quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178, by Origen, A. D. 230; and the occaſion of writing the epiſtles is given at large by Euſebius and Jerome. What are called the ſmaller epiſtles of Ignatius are generally deemed to be thoſe which were read by Irenæus, Origen, and Euſebius *.

In theſe epiſtles are various undoubted alluſions to the goſpels of St. Matthew and St. John; yet ſo far of the ſame form with thoſe in the preceding articles, that, like

* Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 147.

them, they are not accompanied with marks of quotation.

Of these allusions the following are clear specimens:

*Matt.** "Christ was baptised of John, that *all righteousness might be fulfilled by him.*"

"*Be ye wise as serpents* in all things, and *harmless as a dove.*"

John† "Yet the spirit is not deceived, being from God; for it knows *whence it comes, and whither it goes.*"

"He (Christ) is the *door* of the Father, by which *enter in* Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the Apostles and the Church."

As

* iii. 15. "For thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness."

xi. 16. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

† iii. 8. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell *whence*

As to the manner of quotation this is obſervable:—Ignatius, in one place, ſpeaks of St. Paul in terms of high reſpect, and quotes his epiſtle to the Epheſians by *name*; yet in ſeveral other places he borrows words and ſentiments from the ſame epiſtle without mentioning it: which ſhews, that this was his general manner of uſing and applying writings then extant, and then of high authority.

V. Polycarp * had been taught by the apoſtles; had converſed with many who had ſeen Chriſt; was alſo by the apoſtles appointed Biſhop of Smyrna. This teſtimony concerning Polycarp is given by Irenæus, who in his youth had ſeen him. "I can tell the place," ſaith Irenæus, "in which the bleſſed Polycarp ſat and taught, and his going out and coming in, and the manner of his life, and the form of his perſon, and

whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; ſo is every one that is born of the ſpirit."

x. 9. "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he ſhall be ſaved."

* Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 192.

the diſcourſes he made to the people, and how he related his converſation with John and others who had ſeen the Lord, and how he related their ſayings, and what he had heard concerning the Lord, both concerning his miracles and his doctrine, as he had received them from the eye-witneſſes of the word of life: all which Polycarp related agreeable to the ſcriptures."

Of Polycarp, whoſe proximity to the age and country and perſons of the apoſtles is thus atteſted, we have one undoubted epiſtle remaining. And this, though a ſhort letter, contains nearly forty clear alluſions to books of the New Teſtament; which is ſtrong evidence of the reſpect which Chriſtians of that age bore for theſe books.

Amongſt theſe, although the writings of St. Paul are more frequently uſed by Polycarp than other parts of ſcripture, there are copious alluſions to the goſpel of St. Matthew, ſome to paſſages found in the goſpels both of Matthew and Luke, and ſome which more nearly reſemble the words in Luke.

I ſelect

I ſelect the following, as fixing the authority of the Lord's prayer, and the uſe of it amongſt the primitive Chriſtians, "If therefore we *pray* the Lord that *he will forgive us, we ought alſo to forgive.*"

"With ſupplication *beſeeching* the all-ſeeing God *not to lead us into temptation.*"

And the following, for the ſake of repeating an obſervation already made, that words of our Lord, found in our goſpels, were at this early day quoted as ſpoken by him; and not only ſo, but quoted with ſo little queſtion or conſciouſneſs of doubt, about their being really his words, as not even to mention, much leſs to canvaſs, the authority from which they were taken.

"But remembering what the Lord ſaid, teaching, Judge not, that ye be not judged; forgive, and ye ſhall be forgiven; be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; with what meaſure ye mete, it ſhall be meaſured to you again*."

* Mat. vii. 1, 2. v. 7. Luke vi. 37, 38.

Suppoſing Polycarp to have had theſe words from the books in which we now find them, it is manifeſt that theſe books were conſidered by him, and, as he thought, conſidered by his readers, as authentic accounts of Chriſt's diſcourſes; and that that point was inconteſtable.

The following is a deciſive, though what we call a tacit, reference to St. Peter's ſpeech in the Acts of the Apoſtles:—"whom God hath raiſed, having looſed the pains of death *."

VI. Papias †, a hearer of John, and companion of Polycarp, as Irenæus atteſts, and of that age as all agree, in a paſſage quoted by Euſebius, from a work now loſt, expreſsly aſcribes the reſpective goſpels to Matthew and Mark; and in a manner which proves, that theſe goſpels muſt have publicly borne the names of theſe authors at that time, and probably long before; for

* Acts ii. 24. † Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 239.

Papias does not ſay, that one goſpel was written by Matthew, and another by Mark; but, aſſuming this as perfectly well known, he tells us from what materials Mark collected his account, viz. from Peter's preaching, and in what language Matthew wrote, viz. in Hebrew. Whether Papias was well informed in this ſtatement or not; to the point from which I produce this teſtimony, namely, that theſe books bore theſe names at this time, his authority is complete.

The writers hitherto alledged, had all lived and converſed with ſome of the apoſtles. The works of theirs which remain, are in general very ſhort pieces, yet rendered extremely valuable by their antiquity; and none, ſhort as they are, but what contain ſome important teſtimony to our hiſtorical ſcriptures*.

VII. Not

* That the quotations are more thinly ſtrown in theſe, than in the writings of the next and of ſucceeding ages, is, in a good meaſure, accounted for by the obſervation, that the ſcriptures of the New Teſtament had

VII. Not long after theſe, that is, not much more than twenty years after the laſt, follows Juſtin Martyr*. His remaining works are much larger than any that have yet been noticed. Although the nature of his two principal writings, one of which was addreſſed to heathens, and the other was a conference with a Jew, did not lead him to ſuch frequent appeals to Chriſtian books, as would have appeared in a diſcourſe intended for Chriſtian readers; we nevertheleſs reckon up in them between twenty and thirty quotations of the Goſpels and Acts of the Apoſtles, certain, diſtinct, and copious; if each verſe be counted ſeparately, a much

had not *yet*, nor by their recency hardly could have, become a general part of Chriſtian education; read, as the Old Teſtament was, by Jews and Chriſtians from their childhood, and thereby intimately mixing, as that had long done, with all their religious ideas, and with their language upon religious ſubjects. In proceſs of time, and as ſoon perhaps as could be expected, this came to be the caſe. And then we perceive the effect, in a proportionably greater frequency, as well as copiouſneſs of alluſion†.

* Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 258.

† Mich. Intr. c. ii. ſect. vi.

greater

greater number; if each expreſſion, a very great one *.

We meet with quotations of three of the goſpels within the compaſs of half a page; "and in other words he ſays, Depart from me into outer darkneſs, which the Father hath prepared for Satan and his angels," (which is from Matthew xxv. 41.) "And again he ſaid in other words, I give unto you power to tread upon ſerpents and ſcorpions, and venomous beaſts, and upon all the power of the enemy." (This from Luke x. 19.) "And, before he was crucified, he ſaid, The ſon of man muſt ſuffer many things, and be rejected of the Scribes and Phariſees, and be crucified, and riſe again the third day." (This from Mark viii. 31.)

In another place Juſtin quotes a paſſage in the hiſtory of Chriſt's birth, as delivered

* He cites our preſent canon, and particularly our four Goſpels continually, I dare ſay, above two hundred times." Jones's New and Full Method. Appen. vol. i. p. 589, ed. 1726.

by

by Matthew and John, and fortifies his quotation by this remarkable teſtimony; "as they have taught, who have writ the hiſtory of all things concerning our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt; and we believe them."

Quotations alſo are found from the Goſpel of St. John.

What, moreover, ſeems extremely material to be obſerved, is, that in all Juſtin's works, from which might be extracted almoſt a complete life of Chriſt, there are but two inſtances, in which he refers to any thing as ſaid or done by Chriſt, which is not related concerning him in our preſent goſpels: which ſhews, that theſe goſpels, and theſe, we may ſay, alone, were the authorities from which the Chriſtians of that day drew the information upon which they depended. One of theſe inſtances is of a ſaying of Chriſt not met with in any book now extant*. The other of a circumſtance in Chriſt's

* "Wherefore alſo our Lord Jeſus Chriſt has ſaid, In

Chriſt's baptiſm, namely, a fiery or luminous appearance upon the water, which, according to Epiphanius, is noticed in the Goſpel of the Hebrews: and which might be true; but which, whether true or falſe, is mentioned by Juſtin, with a plain mark of diminution, when compared with what he quotes as reſting upon ſcripture authority. The reader will advert to this diſtinction; "and then, when Jeſus came to the river Jordan,

In whatſoever I ſhall find you, in the ſame I will alſo judge you." Poſſibly Juſtin deſigned not to quote any text, but to repreſent the ſenſe of many of our Lord's ſayings. Fabricius has obſerved, that this ſaying has been quoted by many writers, and that Juſtin is the only one who aſcribes it to our Lord, and that perhaps by a ſlip of his memory.

Words reſembling theſe are read repeatedly in Ezekiel, "I will judge them according to their ways." (vii. 3. xxxiii. 20.) It is remarkable that Juſtin had but juſt before expreſsly quoted Ezekiel. Mr. Jones upon this circumſtance founded a conjecture, that Juſtin wrote only "the Lord hath ſaid," intending to quote the words of God, or rather the ſenſe of thoſe words, in Ezekiel; and that ſome tranſcriber, imagining theſe to be the words of Chriſt, inſerted in his copy the addition "Jeſus Chriſt." Vol. i. p. 539.

where

where John was baptiſing, as Jeſus deſcended into the water, a fire alſo was kindled in Jordan; and when he came up out of the water, *the apoſtles of this our Chriſt have written*, that the Holy Ghoſt lighted upon him as a dove."

All the references in Juſtin are made without mentioning the author; which proves that theſe books were perfectly notorious, and that there were no other accounts of Chriſt then extant, or, at leaſt, no others ſo received and credited, as to make it neceſſary to diſtinguiſh theſe from the reſt.

But although Juſtin mentions not the authors' names, he calls thebooks, "Memoirs compoſed by the Apoſtles," "Memoirs compoſed by the Apoſtles and their Companions;" which deſcriptions, the latter eſpecially, exactly ſuit with the titles which the Goſpels and Acts of the Apoſtles now bear.

VIII. Hegeſippus* came about thirty

* Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 314.

years

years after Juſtin. His teſtimony is remarkable only for this particular; that he relates of himſelf, that, travelling from Paleſtine to Rome, he viſited upon his journey many biſhops; and that "in every ſucceſſion, and in every city, the ſame doctrine is taught, which the Law, and the Prophets, and the *Lord* teacheth." This is an important atteſtation, from good authority, and of high antiquity. It is generally underſtood that by the word "Lord," Hegeſippus intended ſome writing or writings, containing the teaching of Chriſt, in which ſenſe alone the term combines with the other terms "Law and Prophets," which denote writings; and together with them admits of the verb "preacheth," in the preſent tenſe. Then, that theſe writings were ſome or all of the books of the New Teſtament, is rendered probable from hence, that in the fragments of his works, which are preſerved in Euſebius, and in a writer of the ninth century, enough though it be little, is left to ſhew, that Hegeſippus expreſſed divers things in the ſtyle of the Goſpels, and of the Acts of

the

the Apoſtles; that he referred to the hiſtory in the ſecond chapter of Matthew, and recited a text of that Goſpel as ſpoken by our Lord.

IX. At this time, viz. about the year 170, the churches of Lyons and Vienne in France ſent a relation of the ſufferings of their martyrs to the churches of Aſia and Phrygia *. The epiſtle is preſerved entire by Euſebius. And what carries in ſome meaſure the teſtimony of theſe churches to a higher age is, that they had now for their biſhop Pothinus, who was ninety years old, and whoſe early life conſequently muſt have immediately joined on with the times of the apoſtles. In this epiſtle are exact references to the Goſpels of Luke and John, and to the Acts of the Apoſtles. The form of reference the ſame as in all the preceding articles. That from St. John is in theſe words: "Then was fulfilled that which was ſpoken by the Lord, that whoſoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God ſervice †."

* Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 332. † John xvi. 2.

X. The

X. The evidence now opens upon us full and clear. Irenæus* ſucceeded Pothinus as biſhop of Lyons. In his youth he had been a diſciple of Polycarp, who was a diſciple of John. In the time in which he lived, he was diſtant not much more than a century from the publication of the Goſpels; in his inſtruction, only by one ſtep ſeparated from the perſons of the Apoſtles. He aſſerts of himſelf and his contemporaries, that they were able to reckon up, in all the principal churches, the ſucceſſion of biſhops from the firſt†. I remark theſe particulars concerning Irenæus with more formality than uſual; becauſe the teſtimony which this writer affords to the hiſtorical books of the New Teſtament, to their authority, and to the titles which they bear, is expreſs, poſitive, and excluſive. One principal paſſage, in which this teſtimony is contained, opens with a preciſe aſſertion of the point which we have laid down as the foundation of our argument, viz. that the ſtory which the Goſpels exhibit is the ſtory which the Apoſtles told. "We have

* Lard. vol. i. p. 344. † Adv. Hæreſ. l. iii. c. 3.

not received," ſaith Irenæus, "the knowledge of the way of our ſalvation by any others than thoſe by whom the goſpel has been brought to us. Which goſpel they firſt preached, and afterwards, by the will of God, committed to writing, that it might be for time to come the foundation and pillar of our faith.—For after that our Lord roſe from the dead, and they (the apoſtles) were endowed from above with the power of the Holy Ghoſt coming down upon them, they received a perfect knowledge of all things. They then went forth to all the ends of the earth, declaring to men the bleſſing of heavenly peace, having all of them, and every one alike, the goſpel of God. Matthew then, among the Jews, writ a goſpel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the goſpel at Rome, and founding a church there. And after their exit, Mark alſo, the diſciple and interpreter of Peter, delivered to us in writing the things that had been preached by Peter. And Luke, the companion of Paul, put down in a book the goſpel preached by him (Paul). Afterwards

John,

John, the diſciple of the Lord, who alſo leaned upon his breaſt, he likewiſe publiſhed a goſpel while he dwelt at Epheſus in Aſia." If any modern divine ſhould write a book upon the genuineneſs of the goſpels, he could not aſſert it more expreſsly, or ſtate their original more diſtinctly, than Irenæus hath done within little more than a hundred years after they were publiſhed.

The correſpondency, in the days of Irenæus, of the oral and written tradition, and the deduction of the oral tradition through various channels from the age of the apoſtles, which was then lately paſſed, and, by conſequence, the probability that the books truly delivered what the apoſtles taught, is inferred alſo with ſtrict regularity from another paſſage of his works. "The tradition of the apoſtles (this Father ſaith) hath ſpread itſelf over the whole univerſe; and all they, who ſearch after the ſources of truth, will find this tradition to be held ſacred in every church. We might enumerate all thoſe who have been appointed biſhops to theſe

churches by the apoſtles, and all their ſucceſſors, up to our days. It is by this uninterrupted ſucceſſion that we have received the tradition which actually exiſts in the church, as alſo the doctrines of truth, as it was preached by the apoſtles*." The reader will obſerve upon this, that the ſame Irenæus, who is now ſtating the ſtrength and uniformity of the tradition, we have before ſeen recognizing, in the fulleſt manner, the authority of the written records; from which we are entitled to conclude, that they were then conformable to each other.

I have ſaid, that the teſtimony of Irenæus in favour of our goſpels is *excluſive* of all others. I allude to a remarkable paſſage in his works, in which, for ſome reaſons ſufficiently fanciful, he endeavours to ſhew, that there could be neither more nor fewer goſpels than *four*. With his argument we have no concern. The poſition itſelf proves that four, and only four, goſpels were at that

* Ir. in Hær. l. iii. c. 3.

time

time publicly read and acknowledged. That theſe were our goſpels, and in the ſtate in which we now have them, is ſhown from many other places of this writer beſide that which we have already alledged. He mentions how Matthew begins his goſpel, how Mark begins and ends his, and their ſuppoſed reaſons for ſo doing. He enumerates at length the ſeveral paſſages of Chriſt's hiſtory in Luke, which are not found in any of the other evangeliſts. He ſtates the particular deſign with which St. John compoſed his goſpel, and accounts for the doctrinal declarations which precede the narrative.

To the book of the Acts of the Apoſtles, its author and credit, the teſtimony of Irenæus is no leſs explicit. Referring to the account of St. Paul's converſion and vocation, in the ninth chapter of that book, "Nor can they (ſays he, meaning the parties with whom he argues) ſhew that he is not to be credited, who has related to us the truth with the greateſt exactneſs." In another place, he has actually collected the ſe-

veral texts, in which the writer of the hiſtory is repreſented as accompanying St. Paul, which leads him to deliver a ſummary of almoſt the whole of the laſt twelve chapters of the book.

In an author, thus abounding with references and alluſions to the ſcriptures, there is not one to any apocryphal Chriſtian writing whatever. This is a broad line of diſtinction between our ſacred books, and the pretenſions of all others.

The force of the teſtimony of the period which we have conſidered, is greatly ſtrengthened by the obſervation, that it is the teſtimony, and the concurring teſtimony, of writers who lived in countries remote from one another. Clement flouriſhed at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Juſtin Martyr in Syria, and Irenæus in France.

XI. Omitting Athenagoras and Theophilus, who lived about this time*; in the re-

* Lard. vol. i. p. 400.—Ib. 422.

maining works of the former of whom are clear references to Mark and Luke; and in the works of the latter, who was biſhop of Antioch, the ſixth in ſucceſſion from the apoſtles, evident alluſions to Matthew and John, and probable alluſions to Luke (which, conſidering the nature of the compoſitions, that they were addreſſed to heathen readers, is as much as could be expected); obſerving alſo, that the works of two learned Chriſtian writers of the ſame age, Miltiades and Pantænus*, are now loſt; of which Miltiades Euſebius records, that his writings "were monuments of zeal for the divine oracles;" and which Pantænus, as Jerome teſtifies, was a man of prudence and learning, both in the divine ſcriptures and ſecular literature, and had left many commentaries upon the holy ſcriptures then extant: paſſing by theſe without further remark, we come to one of the moſt voluminous of ancient Chriſtian writers, Clement of Alexandria †. Clement followed Irenæus at the diſtance of only ſix-

* Lard. vol. i. p. 418. 450. † Ib. vol. ii. p. 469.

teen years, and therefore may be ſaid to maintain the ſeries of teſtimony in an uninterrupted continuation.

In certain of Clement's works, now loſt, but of which various parts are recited by Euſebius, there is given a diſtinct account of the order in which the four goſpels were written. The goſpels, which contain the genealogies, were (he ſays) written firſt, Mark's next, at the inſtance of Peter's followers, and John's the laſt; and this account he tells us that he had received from Preſbyters of more ancient times. This teſtimony proves the following points; that theſe goſpels were the hiſtories of Chriſt then publicly received, and relied upon; that the dates, occaſions, and circumſtances of their publication were at that time ſubjects of attention and enquiry amongſt Chriſtians. In the works of Clement which remain, the four Goſpels are repeatedly quoted by the names of their authors, and the Acts of the Apoſtles is expreſsly aſcribed to Luke. In one place, after mentioning a particular cir-

cumſtance, he adds theſe remarkable words: "We have not this paſſage *in the four goſpels delivered to us*, but in that according to the Egyptians;" which puts a marked diſtinction between the four goſpels and all other hiſtories, or pretended hiſtories, of Chriſt. In another part of his works, the perfect confidence, with which he received the goſpels, is ſignified by him in theſe words: "That this is true appears from hence, that it is written in the goſpel according to St. Luke; and again, "I need not uſe many words, but only to alledge the evangelic voice of the Lord." His quotations are numerous. The ſayings of Chriſt, of which he alledges many, are all taken from our goſpels, the ſingle exception to this obſervation appearing to be a looſe * quotation of a paſſage in St. Matthew's goſpel.

XII. In

* "Aſk great things, and the ſmall ſhall be added unto you." Clement rather choſe to expound the words of Matthew (vi. 33) than literally to cite them; and this is moſt undeniably proved by another place in the ſame Clement, where he both produces the text and theſe words as an expoſition: —"Seek ye firſt the kingdom of heaven

XII. In the age in which they lived*, Tertullian joins on with Clement. The number of the goſpels then received, the names of the evangeliſts, and their proper deſcriptions, are exhibited by this writer in one ſhort ſentence:—" Among the *apoſtles*, John and Matthew teach us the faith; among *apoſtolical men*, Luke and Mark refreſh it." The next paſſage to be taken from Tertullian, affords as complete an atteſtation to the authenticity of our books, as can be well imagined. After enumerating the churches which had been founded by Paul, at Corinth, in Galatia, at Philippi, Theſſalonica, and Epheſus; the church of Rome eſtabliſhed by Peter and Paul; and other churches derived from John; he proceeds thus:—" I ſay then, that with them, but not with them only which are apoſtolical, but with all who have fellowſhip with

heaven and its righteouſneſs, for theſe are the great things; but the ſmall things, and things relating to this life, ſhall be added unto you." Jones's New and Full Method, vol. i. p. 553.

* Lardner, vol. ii. p. 561

them

them in the ſame faith, is that goſpel of Luke received from its firſt publication, which we ſo zealouſly maintain:" and preſently afterwards adds—"The ſame authority of the apoſtolical churches will ſupport the other goſpels, which we have from them and according to them, I mean John's and Matthew's, although that likewiſe, which Mark publiſhed, may be ſaid to be Peter's, whoſe interpreter Mark was." In another place Tertullian affirms, that the three other goſpels were in the hands of the churches from the beginning, as well as Luke's. This noble teſtimony fixes the univerſality with which the goſpels were received, and their antiquity; that they were in the hands of all, and had been ſo from the firſt. And this evidence appears not more than one hundred and fifty years after the publication of the books. The reader muſt be given to underſtand that, when Tertullian ſpeaks of maintaining or defending *(tuendi)* the Goſpel of St. Luke, he only means maintaining or defending the integrity of the copies of Luke received by Chriſtian churches, in oppoſition

poſition to certain curtailed copies uſed by Marcion, againſt whom he writes.

This author frequently cites the Acts of the Apoſtles under that title, once calls it Luke's commentary, and obſerves how St. Paul's epiſtles confirm it.

After this general evidence, it is unneceſſary to add particular quotations. Theſe, however, are ſo numerous and ample, as to have led Dr. Lardner to obſerve, "that there are more, and larger, quotations of the ſmall volume of the New Teſtament in this one Chriſtian author, than there are of all the works of Cicero in writers of all characters for ſeveral ages*."

Tertullian quotes no Chriſtian writing as of equal authority with the ſcriptures, and no ſpurious book at all; a broad line of diſtinction, we may once more obſerve, between our ſacred books and all others.

* Lard. vol. ii. p. 647.

We

We may again likewiſe remark the wide extent through which the reputation of the Goſpels, and of the Acts of the Apoſtles, had ſpread, and the perfect conſent in this point of diſtant and independent ſocieties. It is now only about one hundred and fifty years ſince Chriſt was crucified; and within this period, to ſay nothing of the apoſtolical Fathers who have been noticed already, we have Juſtin Martyr at Neapolis, Theophilus at Antioch, Irenæus in France, Clement at Alexandria, Tertullian at Carthage, quoting the ſame books of hiſtorical ſcriptures, and, I may ſay, quoting theſe alone.

XIII. An interval of only thirty years, and that occupied by no ſmall number of Chriſtian writers*, whoſe works only remain in fragments and quotations, and in every one of which is ſome reference or other to the goſpels (and in one of them—Hippolytus, as preſerved in Theodoret—is an abſtract

* Minucius Felix, Apollonius, Caius, Aſterius, Urbanus, Alexander biſhop of Jeruſalem, Hippolitus, Ammonius, Julius Africanus.

of

of the whole goſpel hiſtory), brings us to a name of great celebrity in Chriſtian antiquity, Origen* of Alexandria, who, in the quantity of his writings, exceeded the moſt laborious of the Greek and Latin authors. Nothing can be more peremptory upon the ſubject now under conſideration, and, from a writer of his learning and information, more ſatisfactory, than the declaration of Origen, preſerved, in an extract from his works, by Euſebius: "That the four goſpels alone are received without diſpute by the whole church of God under heaven:" to which declaration is immediately ſubjoined a brief hiſtory of the reſpective authors, to whom they were then, as they are now, aſcribed. The language holden concerning the goſpels throughout the works of Origen which remain, entirely correſpond with the teſtimony here cited. His atteſtation to the Acts of the Apoſtles is no leſs poſitive: "And Luke alſo once more ſounds the trumpet relating the acts of the Apoſtles." The

* Lard. vol. iii. p. 234.

univerſality

univerſality with which the ſcriptures were then read, is well ſignified by this writer, in a paſſage in which he has occaſion to obſerve againſt Celſus, "That it is not in any private books, or ſuch as are read by a few only, and thoſe ſtudious perſons, but in books read by every body, that it is written, the inviſible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by things that are made." It is to no purpoſe to ſingle out quotations of ſcripture from ſuch a writer as this. We might as well make a ſelection of the quotations of ſcripture in Dr. Clarke's ſermons. They are ſo thickly ſown in the works of Origen, that Dr. Mill ſays, "If we had all his works remaining, we ſhould have before us almoſt the whole text of the Bible *."

Origen notices, in order to cenſure, certain apocryphal goſpels. He alſo uſes four writings of this ſort; that is, throughout his large works he once or twice, at the moſt, quotes

* Mill. proleg. cap. vi. p. 66.

each

each of the four; but always with ſome mark, either of direct reprobation, or of caution to his readers, manifeſtly eſteeming them of little or no authority.

XIV. Gregory, biſhop of Neoceſarea, and Dionyſius of Alexandria, were ſcholars of Origen. Their teſtimony, therefore, though full and particular, may be reckoned a repetition only of his. The ſeries however, of evidence, is continued by Cyprian, biſhop of Carthage, who flouriſhed within twenty years after Origen. "The church (ſays this Father) is watered like Paradiſe, by four rivers, that is, by four goſpels." The Acts of the Apoſtles is alſo frequently quoted by Cyprian under that name, and under the name of the "Divine Scriptures." In his various writings are ſuch conſtant and copious citations of ſcripture, as to place this part of the teſtimony beyond controverſy. Nor is there, in the works of this eminent African biſhop, one quotation of a ſpurious or apocryphal Chriſtian writing.

XV. Paſſing

XV. Paſſing over a crowd * of writers following Cyprian, at different diſtances, but all within forty years of his time; and who all, in the imperfect remains of their works, either cite the hiſtorical ſcriptures of the New Teſtament, or ſpeak of them in terms of profound reſpect; I ſingle out Victorin, biſhop of Pettaw in Germany, merely on account of the remoteneſs of his ſituation from that of Origen and Cyprian, who were Africans: by which circumſtance, his teſtimony taken in conjunction with theirs, proves that the ſcripture hiſtories, and the ſame hiſtories, were known and received from one ſide of the Chriſtian world to the other. This biſhop † lived about the year 290; and in a commentary upon this text of the Revelations, "The firſt was like a lion, the ſecond was like a calf, the third like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle," he makes out

* Novatus, Rome, A. D. 251. Dionyſius, Rome, A. D. 259. Commodian, A. D. 270. Anatolius, Laodicea, A. D. 270. Theognoſtus, A. D. 282. Methodius, Lycia, A. D. 290. Phileas, Egypt, 296.

† Lard. vol. v. p. 214.

that by the four creatures are intended the four Goſpels; and, to ſhew the propriety of the ſymbols, he recites the ſubject with which each evangeliſt opens his hiſtory. The explication is fanciful, but the teſtimony poſitive. He alſo expreſsly cites the Acts of the Apoſtles.

XVI. Arnobius and Lactantius *, about the year 300, compoſed formal arguments upon the credibility of the Chriſtian religion. As theſe arguments were addreſſed to Gentiles, the authors abſtain from quoting Chriſtian books *by name*, one of them giving this very reaſon for his reſerve: but when they come to ſtate, for the information of their readers, the outlines of Chriſt's hiſtory, it is apparent that they draw their accounts from our goſpels, and from no other ſources; for theſe ſtatements exhibit a ſummary of almoſt every thing which is related of Chriſt's actions and miracles by the four evangeliſts. Arnobius vindicates, without mentioning their names, the credit of theſe hiſtorians,

* Ib. vol. vii. p. 43. 291.

obſerving

obſerving that they were eye-witneſſes of the facts which they relate, and that their ignorance of the arts of compoſition was rather a confirmation of their teſtimony, than an objection to it. Lactantius alſo argues in defence of the religion, from the conſiſtency, ſimplicity, diſintereſtedneſs, and ſufferings of the Chriſtian hiſtorians, meaning by that term our evangeliſts.

XVII. We cloſe the ſeries of teſtimonies with that of Euſebius*, biſhop of Ceſarea, who flouriſhed in the year 315, contemporary with, or poſterior only by fifteen years to, the two authors laſt cited. This voluminous writer, and moſt diligent collector of the writings of others, beſide a variety of large works, compoſed a hiſtory of the affairs of Chriſtianity from its origin to his own time. His teſtimony to the ſcriptures is the teſtimony of a man much converſant in the works of Chriſtian authors written during the three firſt centuries of its æra; and

* Ib. vol. viii. p. 33.

who had read many which are now loſt. In a paſſage of his evangelical demonſtration, Euſebius remarks, with great nicety, the delicacy of two of the evangeliſts, in their manner of noticing any circumſtance which regarded themſelves, and of Mark, as writing under Peter's direction, in the circumſtances which regarded him. The illuſtration of this remark leads him to bring together long quotations from each of the evangeliſts; and the whole paſſage is a proof, that Euſebius, and the Chriſtians of thoſe days, not only read the goſpels, but ſtudied them with attention and exactneſs. In a paſſage of his eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, he treats, in form, and at large, of the occaſions of writing the four goſpels, and of the order in which they were written. The title of the chapter is "Of the Order of the Goſpels;" and it begins thus: "Let us obſerve the writings of this apoſtle John, which are not contradicted by any; and, firſt of all, muſt be mentioned, as acknowledged by all, the goſpel according to him, well known to all the churches under heaven; and that it has been

juſtly placed by the ancients the fourth in order, and after the other three, may be made evident in this manner." Euſebius then proceeds to ſhew that John wrote the laſt of the four, and that his goſpel was intended to ſupply the omiſſions of the others; eſpecially in the part of our Lord's miniſtry, which took place before the impriſonment of John the Baptiſt. He obſerves, "that the apoſtles of Chriſt were not ſtudious of the ornaments of compoſition, nor indeed forward to write at all, being wholly occupied with their miniſtry."

This learned author makes no uſe at all of Chriſtian writings, forged with the names of Chriſt's apoſtles, or their companions.

We cloſe this branch of our evidence here; becauſe, after Euſebius, there is no room for any queſtion upon the ſubject; the works of Chriſtian writers being as full of texts of ſcripture, and of references to ſcripture, as the diſcourſes of modern divines. Future teſtimonies to the books of ſcripture could only prove that they never loſt their character or authority.

SECT. II.

When the ſcriptures are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted with peculiar reſpect, as books ſui generis; *as poſſeſſing an authority which belonged to no other books, and as concluſive in all queſtions and controverſies amongſt Chriſtians.*

BESIDE the general ſtrain of reference and quotation, which uniformly and ſtrongly indicates this diſtinction, the following may be regarded as ſpecific teſtimonies.

I. Theophilus*, biſhop of Antioch, the ſixth in ſucceſſion from the apoſtles, and who flouriſhed little more than a century after the books of the New Teſtament were written, having occaſion to quote one of our goſpels, writes thus: "Theſe things the holy ſcriptures teach us, and all who were moved by the holy ſpirit, among whom John

* Lard. Cred. part ii. vol. i, p. 429.

ſays,

ſays, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Again: "Concerning the righteouſneſs which the law teaches, the like things are to be found in the prophets and the *goſpels*, becauſe that all being inſpired, ſpoke by one and the ſame Spirit of God*." No words can teſtify more ſtrongly than theſe do, the high and peculiar reſpect in which theſebooks were holden.

II. A writer againſt Artemon †, who may be ſuppoſed to come about one hundred and fifty-eight years after the publication of the ſcriptures, in a paſſage quoted by Euſebius, uſes theſe expreſſions: "Poſſibly what they (our adverſaries) ſay, might have been credited, *if firſt of all* the divine ſcriptures did not contradict them; *and then* the writings of certain brethren, more ancient than the times of Victor." The brethren mentioned by name, are Juſtin, Miltiades, Tatian, Clement, Irenæus, Melito, with a general ap-

* Ib. vol. i. p. 448. † Ib. vol. iii. p. 40.

peal to many more not named. This paſſage proves, firſt, that there was at that time a collection called *divine ſcriptures*; ſecondly, that theſe ſcriptures were eſteemed of higher authority than the writings of the moſt early and celebrated Chriſtians.

III. In a piece aſcribed to Hippolitus *, who lived near the ſame time, the author profeſſes, in giving his correſpondent inſtruction in the things about which he enquires, " to draw out of the *ſacred fountain*, and to ſet before him from the ſacred ſcriptures, what may afford him ſatisfaction." He then quotes immediately Paul's epiſtles to Timothy, and afterwards many books of the New Teſtament. This preface to the quotations carries in it a marked diſtinction between the ſcriptures and other books.

IV. " *Our* aſſertions and diſcourſes," ſaith Origen †, " are unworthy of credit; we muſt receive the *ſcriptures* as witneſſes."

* Ib. vol. iii. p. 112. † Ib. p. 287, 288, 289.

After

After treating of the duty of prayer, he proceeds with his argument thus: "What we have ſaid may be proved from the divine ſcriptures." In his books againſt Celſus, we find this paſſage: "That our religion teaches us to ſeek after wiſdom, ſhall be ſhewn, both out of the ancient Jewiſh ſcriptures, which we alſo uſe, and out of thoſe written ſince Jeſus, which are believed in the churches to be divine." Theſe expreſſions afford abundant evidence of the peculiar and excluſive authority which the ſcriptures poſſeſſed.

V. Cyprian, biſhop of Carthage *, whoſe age lies cloſe to that of Origen, earneſtly exhorts Chriſtian teachers, in all doubtful caſes, "to go back to the *fountain*; and if the truth has in any caſe been ſhaken, to recur to the goſpels and apoſtolic writings."—"The precepts of the goſpel," ſays he in another place, "are nothing leſs than authoritative divine leſſons, the foundations of our hope, the ſupports of our faith, the guides of

* Ib. vol. iv. p. 84c.

our

our way, the ſafe-guards of our courſe to heaven."

VI. Novatus *, a Roman, contemporary with Cyprian, appeals to the ſcriptures, as the authority by which all errors were to be repelled, and diſputes decided. "That Chriſt is not only man, but God alſo, is proved by the ſacred authority of the divine writings."---"The divine ſcripture eaſily detects and confutes the frauds of heretics."—"It is not by the fault of the heavenly ſcriptures, which never deceive." Stronger aſſertions than theſe could not be uſed.

VII. At the diſtance of twenty years from the writer laſt cited, Anatolius †, a learned Alexandrian, and biſhop of Laodicea, ſpeaking of the rule for keeping Eaſter, a queſtion at that day agitated with much earneſtneſs, ſays of thoſe whom he oppoſed, "They can by no means prove their point by the authority of the divine ſcripture."

* Ib. vol. v. p. 102. † Ib. vol. v. p. 146.

VIII. The

VIII. The Arians, who ſprung up about fifty years after this, argued ſtrenuouſly againſt the uſe of the words conſubſtantial and eſſence, and like phraſes; "*because they were not in ſcripture*". And in the ſame ſtrain, one of their advocates opens a conference with Auguſtine, after the following manner: "If you ſay what is reaſonable, I muſt ſubmit. If you alledge any thing from the divine ſcriptures, which are common to both, I muſt hear. But unſcriptural expreſſions (quæ extra ſcripturam ſunt) deſerve no regard."

Athanaſius, the great antagoniſt of Arianiſm, after having enumerated the books of the Old and New Teſtament, adds, "Theſe are the fountains of ſalvation, that he who thirſts may be ſatisfied with the oracles contained in them. In theſe alone the doctrine of ſalvation is proclaimed. Let no man add to them, or take any thing from them †.

* Ib. vol. vii. p. 283, 284. † Ib. vol. xii. p. 182.

IX. Cyril,

IX. Cyril, biſhop of Jeruſalem*, who wrote about twenty years after the appearance of Arianiſm, uſes theſe remarkable words: "Concerning the divine and holy myſteries of faith, not the leaſt article ought to be delivered without the divine ſcriptures." We are aſſured that Cyril's ſcriptures were the ſame as ours, for he has left us a catalogue of the books included under that name.

X. Epiphanius†, twenty years after Cyril, challenges the Arians, and the followers of Origen, "to produce any paſſage of the Old or New Teſtament, favouring their ſentiments."

XI. Pœbadius, a Gallic biſhop, who lived about thirty years after the council of Nice, teſtifies, that "the biſhops of that council firſt conſulted the ſacred volumes, and then declared their faith‡."

* Ib. vol. viii. p. 276. † Ib. p. 314.
‡ Ib. vol. ix. p. 52.

XII. Baſil,

XII. Baſil, biſhop of Ceſarea, in Cappadocia, contemporary with Epiphanius, ſays, "that hearers inſtructed in the ſcriptures ought to examine what is ſaid by their teachers, and to embrace what is agreeable to the ſcriptures, and to reject what is otherwiſe*."

XIII. Ephraim, the Syrian, a celebrated writer of the ſame times, bears this concluſive teſtimony to the propoſition which forms the ſubject of our preſent chapter: "The truth written in the ſacred volume of the goſpel, is a perfect rule. Nothing can be taken from it, nor added to it, without great guilt†."

XIV. If we add Jerome to theſe, it is only for the evidence which he affords of the judgment of preceding ages. Jerome obſerves, concerning the quotations of *ancient* Chriſtian writers, that is, of writers who were *ancient* in the year 400, that they

* Ib. vol. ix. p. 124. † Ib. p. 202.

made

made a diſtinction between books; ſome they quoted as of authority, and others not: which obſervation relates to the books of ſcripture, compared with other writings, apocryphal or heathen*.

* Ib. vol. x. p. 123, 124.

SECT.

SECT. III.

The ſcriptures were in very early times collected into a diſtinct volume.

IGNATIUS, who was biſhop of Antioch within forty years after the aſcenſion, and who had lived and converſed with the apoſtles, ſpeaks of the goſpel and of the apoſtles, in terms which render it very probable, that he meant by the goſpel, the book or volume of the Goſpels, and by the apoſtles, the book or volume of their Epiſtles. His words in one place are *, "fleeing to the Goſpel as the fleſh of Jeſus, and to the Apoſtles as the preſbytery of the church;" that is, as Le Clerc interprets them, "in order to underſtand the will of God, he fled to the goſpels, which he believed no leſs than if Chriſt in the fleſh had been ſpeaking to him; and to the writings of the

* Lard. Cred. part ii. vol. i. p. 180.

apoſtles,

apoſtles, whom he eſteemed as the preſbytery of the whole Chriſtian church." It muſt be obſerved, that about eighty years after this we have direct proof, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria *, that theſe two names, "Goſpel" and "Apoſtles," were the names by which the writings of the New Teſtament, and the diviſion of theſe writings, were uſually expreſſed.

Another paſſage from Ignatius is the following:—"But the Goſpel has ſomewhat in it more excellent, the appearance of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, his paſſion, and reſurrection †."

And a third, "Ye ought to hearken to the Prophets, but eſpecially to the Goſpel, in which the paſſion has been manifeſted to us, and the reſurrection perfected." In this laſt paſſage the prophets and the goſpel are put in conjunction; and as Ignatius undoubtedly meant by the Prophets a collection of writ-

* Ib. vol. ii. p. 516. † Ib. p. 182.

ings

things; it is probable that he meant the ſame by the Goſpel, the two terms ſtanding in evident paralleliſm with each other.

This interpretation of the word "goſpel" in the paſſages above quoted from Ignatius, is confirmed by a piece of nearly equal antiquity, the relation of the martyrdom of Polycarp by the church of Smyrna. "All things," ſay they, "that went before were done, that the Lord might ſhew us a martyrdom according to the goſpel, for he expected to be delivered up as the Lord alſo did*." And in another place, "We do not commend thoſe who offer themſelves, foraſmuch as the goſpel teaches us no ſuch thing†." In both theſe places, what is called the *goſpel* ſeems to be the hiſtory of Jeſus Chriſt, and of his doctrine.

If this be the true ſenſe of the paſſages, they are not only evidences of our propoſition, but ſtrong and very ancient proofs

* Ig. Ep. c. i. † Ib. c. iv.

of the high eſteem in which the books of the New Teſtament were holden.

II. Euſebius relates, that Quadratus and ſome others, who were the immediate ſucceſſors of the apoſtles, travelling abroad to preach Chriſt, carried the goſpels with them, and delivered them to their converts. The words of Euſebius are: "Then travelling abroad, they performed the work of evangeliſts, being ambitious to preach Chriſt, and *deliver the ſcripture of the divine goſpels**." Euſebius had before him the writings both of Quadratus himſelf, and of many others of that age, which are now loſt. It is reaſonable, therefore, to believe, that he had good grounds for his aſſertion. What is thus recorded of the goſpels took place within ſixty, or at the moſt ſeventy, years after they were publiſhed: and it is evident, that they muſt, before this time (and, it is probable, long before this time), have been in general uſe, and in high eſteem in the

* Lard. Cred. pt. ii. vol. i. p. 236.

churches

churches planted by the apoſtles, inaſmuch as they were now, we find, collected into a volume; and the immediate ſucceſſors of the apoſtles, they who preached the religion of Chriſt to thoſe who had not already heard it, carried the volume with them, and delivered it to their converts.

III. Irenæus, in the year 178*, puts the evangelic and apoſtolic writings in connection with the law and the prophets, manifeſtly intending by the one a code or collection of Chriſtian ſacred writings, as the other expreſſed the code or collection of Jewiſh ſacred writings. And,

IV. Melito, at this time biſhop of Sardis, writing to one Oneſimus, tells his correſpondent†, that he had procured an accurate account of the books of the OLD Teſtament. The occurrence, in this paſſage, of the term *Old* Teſtament, has been brought to prove, and it certainly does prove, that there was

* Ib. vol. i. p. 383. † Ib. p. 331.

then a volume or collection of writings called the *New* Teſtament.

V. In the time of Clement of Alexandria, about fifteen years after the laſt quoted teſtimony, it is apparent that the Chriſtian ſcriptures were divided into two parts, under the general titles of the Goſpels and Apoſtles; and that both theſe were regarded as of the higheſt authority. One, out of many expreſſions of Clement alluding to this diſtribution, is the following:—"There is a conſent and harmony between the law and the prophets, the apoſtles and the goſpel*."

VI. The ſame diviſion, "Prophets, Goſpels, and Apoſtles," appears in Tertullian †, the contemporary of Clement. The collection of the goſpels is likewiſe called by this writer the "Evangelic Inſtrument ‡;" the whole volume, the "New Teſtament;" and the two parts, the "Goſpels and Apoſtles §."

* Ib. vol. ii. p. 516.
† Ib. p. 631.
‡ Ib. p. 574.
§ Ib. p. 632.

VII.

VII. From many writers alſo of the third century, and eſpecially from Cyprian, who lived in the middle of it, it is collected, that the Chriſtian ſcriptures were divided into two codes or volumes, one called the "Goſpels or Scriptures of the Lord," the other, the "Apoſtles, or Epiſtles of the Apoſtles*."

VIII. Euſebius, as we have already ſeen, takes ſome pains to ſhew, that the goſpel of St. John had been juſtly placed by the Ancients "the fourth in order, and after the other three †." Theſe are the terms of his propoſition; and the very introduction of ſuch an argument proves inconteſtably, that the four Goſpels had been collected into a volume, to the excluſion of every other; that their order in the volume had been adjuſted with much conſideration; and that this had been done by thoſe who were called Ancients in the time of Euſebius.

In the Diocletian perſecution in the year

* Ib. vol. iv. p. 846. † Ib. vol. viii. p. 92.

303, the ſcriptures were ſought out and burnt*; many ſuffered death rather than deliver them up; and thoſe who betrayed them to the perſecutors were accounted as lapſed and apoſtate. On the other hand, Conſtantine, after his converſion, gave directions for multiplying copies of the divine oracles, and for magnificently adorning them at the expence of the imperial treaſury†. What the Chriſtians of that age ſo richly embelliſhed in their proſperity, and, which is more, ſo tenaciouſly preſerved under perſecution, was the very volume of the New Teſtament which we now read.

* Ib. vol. vii. p. 214 et ſeq. † Ib. p. 432.

SECT.

SECT. IV.

Our preſent ſacred writings were ſoon diſtinguiſhed by appropriate names and titles of reſpect.

1. POLYCARP: "I truſt that ye are well exerciſed in the *holy ſcriptures*—as in theſe ſcriptures it is ſaid, Be ye angry and ſin not, and let not the ſun go down upon your wrath*." This paſſage is extremely important; becauſe it proves that, in the time of Polycarp, who had lived with the apoſtles, there were Chriſtian writings diſtinguiſhed by the name of "holy ſcriptures," or *ſacred* writings. Moreover the text quoted by Polycarp is a text found in the collection at this day. What alſo the ſame Polycarp hath elſewhere quoted in the ſame manner, may be conſidered as proved to belong to the collection; and this comprehends St.

* Lard. Cred. vol. i. p. 203.

Matthew's, and, probably, St. Luke's goſpel, the Acts of the Apoſtles, ten epiſtles of Paul, the firſt epiſtle of Peter, and the firſt of John*. In another place Polycarp has theſe words: "Whoever perverts the *oracles of the Lord* to his own luſts, and ſays there is neither reſurrection nor judgement, he is the firſt-born of Satan †." It does not appear what elſe Polycarp could mean by the "oracles of the Lord," but thoſe ſame "holy ſcriptures," or ſacred writings, of which he had ſpoken before.

II. Juſtin Martyr, whoſe apology was written about thirty years after Polycarp's epiſtle, expreſsly cites ſome of our preſent hiſtories under the title of GOSPEL, and that, not as a name by him firſt aſcribed to them, but as the name by which they were generally known in his time. His words are theſe:—"For the apoſtles, in the memoirs compoſed by them, *which are called goſpels*, have thus delivered it, that Jeſus commanded them to take bread, and give thanks ‡."

* Ib. vol. i. p. 223. † Ib p. 222. ‡ Ib. p. 271.

There

There exists no doubt, but that, by the memoirs above mentioned, Justin meant our present historical scriptures, for, throughout his works, he quotes these, and no others.

III. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, who came thirty years after Justin, in a passage preserved in Eusebius (for his works are lost), speaks "of the scriptures of the Lord *."

IV. And at the same time, or very nearly so, by Irenæus, bishop of Lyons in France †, they are called "divine scriptures,"—"divine oracles,"—"scriptures of the Lord,"—"evangeilc and apostolic writings ‡." The quotations of Irenæus prove decidedly, that our present Gospels, and these alone, together with the Acts of the Apostles, were the historical books comprehended by him under these appellations.

* Ib. vol. i. p. 298.

† The reader will observe the remoteness of these two writers in country and situation.

‡ Ib. p. 343 et seq.

V. St. Matthew's gospel is quoted by Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, contemporary with Irenæus, under the title of the "evangelic voice*;" and the copious works of Clement of Alexandria, published within fifteen years of the same time, ascribe to the books of the New Testament the various titles of "sacred books,"—"divine scriptures,"—"divinely inspired scriptures,"—"scriptures of the Lord,"—"the true evangelical canon†."

VI. Tertullian, who joins on with Clement, beside adopting most of the names and epithets above noticed, calls the gospels "our Digesta," in allusion, as it should seem, to some collection of Roman laws‡ then extant.

VII. By Origen, who came thirty years after Tertullian, the same, and others no less strong titles, are applied to the Christian scriptures; and, in addition thereunto, this

* Ib. vol. i. p. 427. † Ib. vol. ii. p. 515. ‡ Ib. p. 630.

writer

writer frequently ſpeaks of the "Old and New Teſtament," —"the ancient and new ſcriptures,"—"the ancient and new oracles*."

VIII. In Cyprian, who was not twenty years later, they are "books of the ſpirit," —"divine fountains,"—"fountains of the divine fulneſs †."

The expreſſions we have thus quoted are evidences of high and peculiar reſpect. They all occur within two centuries from the publication of the books. Some of them commence with the companions of the apoſtles; and they increaſe in number and variety, through a ſeries of writers, touching upon one another, and deduced from the firſt age of the religion.

* Ib. vol. iii. p. 280. † Ib. vol. iv. p. 844.

SECT.

SECT. V.

Our ſcriptures were publicly read and expounded in the religious aſſemblies of the early Chriſtians.

JUSTIN MARTYR, who wrote in the year 140, which was ſeventy or eighty years after ſome, and leſs, probably, after others of the goſpels were publiſhed, giving, in his firſt apology, an account, to the Emperor, of the Chriſtian worſhip, has this remarkable paſſage:

"The *memoirs of the apoſtles*, or the writings of the prophets, are *read* according as the time allows; and, when the reader has ended, the preſident makes a diſcourſe, exhorting to the imitation of ſo excellent things*."

* Lard. Cred. vol. i. p. 273.

A few

A few ſhort obſervations will ſhew the value of this teſtimony.

1. The "memoirs of the apoſtles," Juſtin in another place expreſsly tells us, are what are called "goſpels;" and that they were the goſpels, which we now uſe, is made certain by Juſtin's numerous quotations of *them*, and his ſilence about any others.

2. Juſtin deſcribes the general uſage of the Chriſtian church.

3. Juſtin does not ſpeak of it as recent or newly inſtituted, but in the terms in which men ſpeak of eſtabliſhed cuſtoms.

II. Tertullian, who followed Juſtin at the diſtance of about fifty years, in his account of the religious aſſemblies of Chriſtians as they were conducted in his time, ſays, "We come together to recollect the divine ſcriptures; we nouriſh our faith, raiſe our hope, confirm our truſt, by the ſacred word*."

* Ib. vol. ii. p. 628.

III. Eu-

III. Euſebius records of Origen, and cites for his authority the letters of Biſhops contemporary with Origen, that, when he went into Paleſtine about the year 216, which was only 16 years after the date of Tertullian's teſtimony, he was deſired by the biſhops of that country to diſcourſe and expound the ſcriptures publicly in the church, though he was not yet ordained a preſbyter*. This anecdote recognizes the uſage, not only of reading, but of expounding, the ſcriptures; and both as ſubſiſting in full force. Origen alſo himſelf bears witneſs to the ſame practice: "This (ſays he) we do, when the ſcriptures are read in the church, and when the diſcourſe for explication is delivered to the people †." And, what is a ſtill more ample teſtimony, many homilies of his upon the ſcriptures of the New Teſtament, delivered by him in the aſſemblies of the church, are ſtill extant.

IV. Cyprian, whoſe age was not twenty

* Ib. vol. iii. p. 68. † Ib. p. 302.

years

years lower than that of Origen, gives his people an account of having ordained two perſons, who were before confeſſors, to be readers; and what they were to read, appears by the reaſon which he gives for his choice:—"Nothing (ſays Cyprian) can be more fit, than that he, who has made a glorious confeſſion of the Lord, ſhould read publicly in the church; that he who has ſhewn himſelf willing to die a martyr, ſhould read the *goſpel of Chriſt*, by which martyrs are made*."

V. Intimations of the ſame cuſtom may be traced in a great number of writers in the beginning and throughout the whole of the fourth century. Of theſe teſtimonies I will only uſe one, as being, of itſelf, expreſs and full. Auguſtine, who appeared near the concluſion of the century, diſplays the benefit of the Chriſtian religion on this very account, the public reading of the ſcriptures in the churches, "where (ſays he) is a con-

* Ib. vol. iv. p. 842.

fluence of all ſorts of people of both ſexes; and where they hear how they ought to live well in this world, that they may deſerve to live happily and eternally in another." And this cuſtom he declares to be univerſal: "The canonical books of ſcripture being read every where, the miracles therein recorded are well known to all people *."

It does not appear that any books, other than our preſent ſcriptures, were thus publicly read, except that the epiſtle of Clement was read in the church of Corinth, to which it had been addreſſed, and in ſome others; and that the Shepherd of Hermas was read in many churches. Nor does it ſubtract much from the value of the argument, that theſe two writings partly come within it, becauſe we allow them to be the genuine writings of apoſtolical men. There is not the leaſt evidence, that any other goſpel, than the four which we receive, was ever admitted to this diſtinction.

* Ib. vol. x. p. 276 et ſeq.

SECT.

SECT. VI.

Commentaries were anciently written upon the ſcriptures; harmonies formed out of them; different copies carefully collated; and verſions made of them into different languages.

NO greater proof can be given of the eſteem in which theſe books were holden by the ancient Chriſtians, or of the ſenſe then entertained of their value and importance, than the induſtry beſtowed upon them. And it ought to be obſerved, that the value and importance of theſe books conſiſted entirely in their genuineneſs and truth. There was nothing in them as works of taſte, or as compoſitions, which could have induced any one to have written a note upon them. Moreover it ſhews that they were even *then* conſidered as ancient books. Men do not write comments upon publications of their

town times: therefore the teſtimonies cited under this head afford an evidence which carries up the evangelic writings much beyond the age of the teſtimonies themſelves, and to that of their reputed authors.

I. Tatian, a follower of Juſtin Martyr, and who flouriſhed about the year 170, compoſed a harmony, or collation, of the goſpels, which he called *Diateſſaron*, Of the four *. The title, as well as the work, is remarkable; becauſe it ſhews that then, as now, there were four, and only four, goſpels in general uſe with Chriſtians. And this was little more than a hundred years after the publication of ſome of them.

II. Pantænus, of the Alexandrian ſchool, a man of great reputation and learning, who came twenty years after Tatian, wrote many commentaries upon the holy ſcriptures, which, as Jerome teſtifies, were extant in his time †.

* Lard. vol. i. p. 307. † Ib. vol. i. p. 455.

III. Clement

III. Clement of Alexandria wrote ſhort explications of many books of the Old and New Teſtament *.

IV. Tertullian appeals from the authority of a later verſion, then in uſe, to the "authentic Greek †."

V. An anonymous author quoted by Euſebius, and who appears to have written about the year 212, appeals to the *ancient copies* of the ſcriptures, in refutation of ſome corrupt readings alledged by the followers of Artemon ‡.

VI. The ſame Euſebius, mentioning by name ſeveral writers of the church who lived at this time, and concerning whom he ſays, "There ſtill remain divers monuments of the laudable induſtry of thoſe ancient and eccleſiaſtical men," *(i. e.* of Chriſtian writers who were conſidered as ancient in the year 300) adds, "There are beſides treatiſes of

* Ib. vol. ii. p. 462. † Ib. p. 638.
‡ Ib. vol. iii. p. 46.

many others, whoſe names we have not been able to learn, orthodox and eccleſiaſtical men, as the interpretations of the divine ſcriptures given by each of them ſhew*."

VII. The five laſt teſtimonies may be referred to the year 200; immediately after which, a period of thirty years gives us

Julius Africanus, who wrote an epiſtle upon the apparent difference in the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, which he endeavours to reconcile by the diſtinction of natural and legal deſcent, and conducts his hypotheſis with great induſtry through the whole ſeries of generations† :

Ammonius, a learned Alexandrian, who compoſed, as Tatian had done, a harmony of *the four goſpels* ; which proves, as Tatian's work did, that there were four goſpels, and no more, at this time in uſe in the church. It affords alſo an inſtance of the zeal of Chriſ-

* Ib. vol. ii. p. 551. † Ib. vol. iii. p. 170.

tians

tians for thoſe writings, and of their ſolicitude about them*:

And, above both theſe, Origen, who wrote commentaries, or homilies, upon moſt of the books included in the New Teſtament, and upon no other books but theſe. In particular, he wrote upon St. John's goſpel, very largely upon St. Matthew's, and commentaries, or homilies, upon the Acts of the Apoſtles †.

VIII. In addition to theſe, the third century likewiſe contains

Dionyſius of Alexandria, a very learned man, who compared, with great accuracy, the accounts in the four goſpels of the time of Chriſt's reſurrection, adding a reflection which ſhewed his opinion of their authority: "Let us not think that the evangeliſts diſagree, or contradict each other, although there be ſome ſmall difference; but let us

* Ib. vol. iii. p. 122. † Ib. p. 352. 192. 202. 245.

honeſtly and faithfully endeavour to reconcile what we read *."

Victorin, biſhop of Petta w in Germany, who wrote comments upon St. Matthew's goſpel †;

Lucian, a preſbyter of Antioch; and Heſychius, an Egyptian biſhop, who put forth editions of the New Teſtament.

IX. The fourth century ſupplies a catalogue ‡ of fourteen writers, who expended their labours upon the books of the New Teſtament, and whoſe works or names are come down to our times; amongſt which number it may be ſufficient, for the pur-

* Ib. vol. iv. p. 661. † Ib. p. 195.

‡ Euſebius, A. D. - 315
Juvencus, Spain, - 330
Theodore, Thrace, 334
Hilary, Poictiers, 354
Fortunatus, - 340
Apollinarius of Laodicea, - 362
Damaſus, Rome, 366
Gregory, Nyſſen, 371
Didymus of Alex. 370
Ambroſe of Milan, 374
Diodore of Tarſus, 378
Gaudent. of Bretcia, 387
Theodore of Cilicia, 394
Jerome, - 395
Chryſoſtom, - 398

poſe

poſe of ſhewing the ſentiments and ſtudies of learned Chriſtians of that age, to notice the following;

Euſebius, in the very beginning of the century, wrote expreſsly upon the diſcrepancies obſervable in the goſpels, and likewiſe a treatiſe, in which he pointed out what things are related by four, what by three, what by two, and what by one evangeliſt *. This author alſo teſtifies, what is certainly a material piece of evidence, "that the writings of the apoſtles had obtained ſuch an eſteem, as to be tranſlated into every language both of Greeks and Barbarians, and to be diligently ſtudied by all nations †." This teſtimony was given about the year 300; how long *before* that date theſe tranſlations were made does not appear.

Damaſus, biſhop of Rome, correſponded with St. Jerome upon the expoſition of difficult texts of ſcripture; and, in a letter ſtill

* Ib. vol. viii. p. 46. † Ib. p. 201.

remaining, defires Jerome to give him a clear explanation of the word Hofanna, found in the New Teftament; "he (Damafus) having met with very different interpretations of it in the Greek and Latin commentaries of catholic writers which he had read*." This laft claufe fhews the number and variety of commentaries then extant.

Gregory of Nyffen, at one time, appeals to the moft exact copies of St. Mark's gofpel; at another time, compares together, and propofes to reconcile, the feveral accounts of the refurrection *given by the four evangelifts*; which limitation proves, that there were no other hiftories of Chrift deemed authentic befide thefe, or included in the fame character with thefe. This writer obferves, acutely enough, that the difpofition of the clothes in the fepulchre, the napkin that was about our Saviour's head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itfelf, did not befpeak the terror

* Ib. vol. ix. p. 108.

and

and hurry of thieves, and therefore refutes the ſtory of the body being ſtolen *.

Ambroſe, biſhop of Milan, remarked various readings in the Latin copies of the New Teſtament, and appeals to the original Greek;

And Jerome, towards the concluſion of this century, put forth an edition of the New Teſtament in Latin, corrected, at leaſt as to the goſpels, by Greek copies, "and thoſe (he ſays) ancient."

Laſtly, Chryſoſtom, it is well known, delivered and publiſhed a great many homilies, or ſermons, upon the Goſpels and the Acts of the Apoſtles.

It is needleſs to bring down this article lower; but it is of importance to add, that there is no example of Chriſtian writers of the three firſt centuries compoſing comments

* Ib. vol. ix. p. 163.

upon

upon any other books than thoſe which are found in the New Teſtament, except the ſingle one of Clement of Alexandria, commenting upon a book called the Revelation of Peter.

Of the *ancient verſions* of the New Teſtament, one of the moſt valuable is the Syriac. Syriac was the language of Paleſtine when Chriſtianity was there firſt eſtabliſhed. And although the books of ſcripture were written in Greek, for the purpoſe of a more extended circulation than within the precincts of Judea, yet it is probable that they would ſoon be tranſlated into the vulgar language of the country where the religion firſt prevailed. Accordingly a Syriac tranſlation is now extant, all along, ſo far as it appears, uſed by the inhabitants of Syria, bearing many internal marks of high antiquity, ſupported in its pretenſions by the uniform tradition of the Eaſt, and confirmed by the diſcovery of many very ancient manuſcripts in the libraries of Europe. It is about 200 years ſince a Biſhop of Antioch ſent a copy of

of this tranſlation into Europe, to be printed; and this ſeems to be the firſt time that the tranſlation became generally known to theſe parts of the world. The Biſhop of Antioch's Teſtament was found to contain all our books, except the ſecond epiſtle of Peter, the ſecond and third of John, and the Revelation; which books, however, have ſince been diſcovered in that language in ſome ancient manuſcripts of Europe. But in this collection, no other book, beſide what is in ours, appears ever to have had a place. And, which is very worthy of obſervation, the text, though preſerved in a remote country, and without communication with ours, differs from ours very little, and in nothing that is important*.

* Jones on the Canon, vol. i. p. 14.

SECT.

SECT. VII.

Our ſcriptures were received by ancient Chriſtians of different ſects and perſuaſions, by many heretics as well as catholics, and were uſually appealed to by both ſides in the controverſies which aroſe in thoſe days

THE three moſt ancient topics of controverſy amongſt Chriſtians, were, the authority of the Jewiſh inſtitution, the origin of evil, and the nature of Chriſt. Upon the firſt of theſe, we find, in very early times, one claſs of heretics rejecting the Old Teſtament entirely; another contending for the obligation of its law, in all its parts, throughout its whole extent, and over every one who ſought acceptance with God. Upon the two latter ſubjects a natural, perhaps, and venial; but a fruitleſs, eager and impatient curioſity, prompted by the philoſophy

and by the ſcholaſtic habits of the age, which carried men much into bold hypotheſes and conjectural ſolutions, raiſed, amongſt ſome who profeſſed Chriſtianity, very wild and unfounded opinions. I think there is no reaſon to believe that the number of theſe bore any conſiderable proportion to the body of the Chriſtian Church; and amidſt the diſputes which ſuch opinions neceſſarily occaſioned, it is a great ſatisfaction to perceive, what in a vaſt plurality of inſtances we do perceive, all ſides recurring to the ſame ſcriptures.

I*. Baſilides lived near the age of the apoſtles, about the year 120, or, perhaps, ſooner†. He rejected the Jewiſh inſtitution, not as ſpurious, but as proceeding from a being inferior to the true God; and

* The materials of the former part of this ſection are taken from Dr. Lardner's hiſtory of the heretics of the two firſt centuries, publiſhed ſince his death, with additions, by the Rev. Mr. Hogg of Exeter, and inſerted into the ninth volume of his works, of the edition of 1788.

† Vol. ix. p. 271.

in

in other reſpects advanced a ſcheme of theology widely different from the general doctrine of the Chriſtian Church, and which, as it gained over ſome diſciples, was warmly oppoſed by Chriſtian writers of the ſecond and third century. In theſe writings there is poſitive evidence, that Baſilides received the goſpel of Matthew; and there is no ſufficient proof that he rejected any of the other three; on the contrary, it appears that he wrote a commentary upon the goſpel, ſo copious as to be divided into twenty-four books *.

II. The Valentinians appeared about the ſame time †. Their hereſy conſiſted in certain notions concerning angelic natures, which can hardly be rendered intelligible to a modern reader. They ſeem, however, to have acquired as much importance as any of the ſeparatiſts of that early age. Of this ſect, Irenæus, who wrote A. D. 172, expreſſly records, that they endeavoured to fetch

* Ib. vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 305, 306. † Ib. p. 350, 351.

arguments

arguments for their opinions from the evangelic and apoſtolic writings *. Heracleon, one of the moſt celebrated of the ſect, and who lived probably ſo early as the year 125, wrote commentaries upon Luke and John †. Some obſervations alſo of his upon Matthew are preſerved by Origen ‡. Nor is there any reaſon to doubt that he received the whole New Teſtament.

III. The Carpocratians were alſo an early hereſy, little, if at all, later than the two preceding §. Some of their opinions reſembled what we at this day mean by Socinianiſm. With reſpect to the ſcriptures, they are ſpecifically charged, by Irenæus and by Epiphanius, with endeavouring to pervert a paſſage in Matthew, which amounts to a poſitive proof that they received that goſpel ‖. Negatively, they are not accuſed, by their adverſaries, of rejecting any part of the New Teſtament.

* Vol. i. p. 383. † Vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 352.
‡ Ib. 353. § Ib. 309. ‖ Ib. 318.

IV. The

IV. The Sethians, A. D. 150 *; the Montaniſts, A. D. 156 †; the Marcoſians, 160‡; Hermogenes, A. D. 180§; Praxias, A.D. 196‖; Artemon, A. D. 200¶; Theodotus, A. D. 200; all included under the denomination of heretics, and all engaged in controverſies with Catholic Chriſtians, received the ſcriptures of the New Teſtament.

V. Tatian, who lived in the year 172, went into many extravagant opinions, was the founder of a ſect called Encratites, and was deeply involved in diſputes with the Chriſtians of that age; yet Tatian ſo received the four goſpels, as to compoſe a harmony from them.

VI. From a writer, quoted by Euſebius, of about the year 200, it is apparent that they, who, at that time, contended for the mere humanity of Chriſt, argued from the ſcriptures; for they are accuſed by this

* Vol. ix. ed. 1783, p. 455.
† Ib. p. 482.
‡ Ib. p. 348.
§ Ib. p. 473.
‖ Ib. p. 433.
¶ Ib. p. 466.

writer,

writer, of making alterations in their copies, in order to favour their opinions *.

VII. Origen's ſentiments excited great controverſies, the Biſhops of Rome and Alexandria, and many others, condemning, the Biſhops of the Eaſt eſpouſing them; yet there is not the ſmalleſt queſtion, but that both the advocates and adverſaries of theſe opinions acknowledged the ſame authority of ſcripture. In his time, which the reader will remember was about one hundred and fifty years after the ſcriptures were publiſhed, many diſſenſions ſubſiſted amongſt Chriſtians, with which they were reproached by Celſus; yet Origen, who has recorded this accuſation without contradicting it, nevertheleſs teſtifies, "that the four goſpels were received *without diſpute*, by the whole church of God under heaven †."

VIII. Paul of Samoſata, about thirty years after Origen, ſo diſtinguiſhed himſelf in the

* Ib. vol. iii. p. 46. † Ib. vol. iv. p. 642.

controverſy concerning the nature of Chriſt, as to be the ſubject of two councils, or ſynods, aſſembled at Antioch, upon his opinions. Yet he is not charged by his adverſaries with rejecting any book of the New Teſtament. On the contrary, Epiphanius, who wrote a hiſtory of heretics a hundred years afterwards, ſays, that Paul endeavoured to ſupport his doctrine by texts of ſcripture. And Vincentius Lirinenſis, A. D. 434, ſpeaking of Paul and other heretics of the ſame age, has theſe words: "Here, perhaps, ſome one may aſk, whether heretics alſo urge the teſtimony of ſcripture. They urge it indeed, explicitly and vehemently; for you may ſee them flying through every book of the ſacred law*."

IX. A controverſy at the ſame time exiſted with the Noetians or Sabellians, who ſeem to have gone into the oppoſite extreme from that of Paul of Samoſata and his followers. Yet, according to the expreſs teſ-

* Ib vol. xi. p. 158.

timony

timony of Epiphanius, Sabellius received all the ſcriptures. And with both ſects catholic writers conſtantly alledge the ſcriptures, and reply to the arguments which their opponents drew from particular texts.

We have here, therefore, a proof that parties, who were the moſt oppoſite and irreconcileable to one another, acknowledged the authority of ſcripture with equal deference.

X. And as a general teſtimony to the ſame point, may be produced what was ſaid by one of the Biſhops of the council of Carthage, which was holden a little before this time. "I am of opinion that blaſphemous and wicked heretics, who *pervert* the ſacred and adorable words of the ſcriptures, ſhould be execrated*." Undoubtedly what they perverted, they received.

XI. The Millennium, Novatianiſm, the

* Ib. vol. xi. p. 839.

baptiſm of heretics, the keeping of Eaſter, engaged alſo the attention, and divided the opinions of Chriſtians, at and before that time (and, by the way, it may be obſerved, that ſuch diſputes, though on ſome accounts to be blamed, ſhewed how much men were in earneſt upon the ſubject); yet every one appealed for the grounds of his opinion to ſcripture authority. Dionyſius of Alexandria, who flouriſhed A. D. 247, deſcribing a conference or public diſputation, with the Millennarians of Egypt, confeſſes of them, though their adverſary, "that they embraced whatever could be made out by good arguments from the holy ſcriptures*." Novatus, A. D. 251, diſtinguiſhed by ſome rigid ſentiments concerning the reception of thoſe who had lapſed, and the founder of a numerous ſect, in his few remaining works quotes the goſpel with the ſame reſpect as other Chriſtians did; and concerning his followers the teſtimony of Socrates, who wrote about the year 440, is poſitive, viz.

* Ib. vol. iv. p. 666.

"That

"That in the diſputes between the catholics and them, each ſide endeavoured to ſupport itſelf by the authority of the divine ſcriptures*."

XII. The Donatiſts, who ſprung up in the year 328, uſed the ſame ſcriptures as we do. "Produce (ſaith Auguſtine) ſome proof from the ſcriptures, whoſe authority is common to us both†."

XIII. It is perfectly notorious, that, in the Arian controverſy, which aroſe ſoon after the year 300, both ſides appealed to the ſame ſcriptures, and with equal profeſſions of deference and regard. The Arians, in their council of Antioch, A. D. 341, pronounce, that, "if any one, contrary to the ſound doctrine of the ſcriptures, ſay that the Son is a creature, as one of the creatures, let him be an anathema‡." They and the Atha-

* Ib. vol. v. p. 105.
† Ib. vol. vii. p. 243.
‡ Ib. p. 277.

naſians mutually accuſe each other of uſing *unſcriptural* phraſes, which was a mutual acknowledgement of the concluſive authority of ſcripture.

XIV. The Priſcillianiſts, A. D. 378*, the Pelagians, A. D. 405†, received the ſame ſcriptures as we do.

XV. The teſtimony of Chryſoſtom, who lived near the year 400, is ſo poſitive in affirmation of the propoſition which we maintain, that it may form a proper concluſion of the argument. "The general reception of the goſpels is a proof that their hiſtory is true and conſiſtent; for, ſince the writing of the goſpels, many hereſies have ariſen, holding opinions contrary to what is contained in them, who yet receive the goſpels either entire or in part‡." I am not moved by what may ſeem a deduction

* Ib. vol. ix. p. 325.
† Ib. vol. xi. p. 52.
‡ Ib. vol. x. p. 316.

from

from Chryſoſtom's teſtimony, the words "entire or in part;" for, if all the parts, which were ever queſtioned in our goſpels, were given up, it would not affect the miraculous origin of the religion in the ſmalleſt degree: *e. g.*

Cerinthus is ſaid by Epiphanius to have received the goſpel of Matthew, but not entire. What the omiſſions were does not appear. The common opinion, that he rejected the two firſt chapters, ſeems to have been a miſtake*. It is agreed, however, by all who have given any account of Cerinthus, that he taught that the Holy Ghoſt (whether he meant by that name a perſon or a power) deſcended upon Jeſus at his baptiſm; that Jeſus from this time performed many miracles, and that he appeared after his death. He muſt have retained therefore the eſſential parts of the hiſtory.

Of all the ancient heretics the moſt ex-

* Ib. vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 322.

traordinary was Marcion*. One of his tenets was the rejection of the Old Teſtament, as proceeding from an inferior and imperfect deity; and in purſuance of this hypotheſis, he eraſed from the New, and that, as it ſhould ſeem, without entering into any critical reaſons, every paſſage which recognized the Jewiſh ſcriptures. He ſpared not a text which contradicted his opinion. It is reaſonable to believe that Marcion treated books as he treated texts: yet this raſh and wild controverſialiſt publiſhed a recenſion, or chaſtiſed edition, of St. Luke's goſpel, containing the leading facts, and all which is neceſſary to authenticate the religion. This example affords proof, that there were always ſome points, and thoſe the main points, which neither wildneſs nor raſhneſs, neither the fury of oppoſition nor the intemperance of controverſy, would venture to call in queſtion. There is no reaſon to believe that Marcion, though full

* Ib. ſect. ii. c. x. Alſo Michael. vol. i. c. 1. ſect. xviii.

of

of reſentment againſt the catholic Chriſtians, ever charged them with forging their books. "The Goſpel of St. Matthew, the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, with thoſe of St. Peter and St. James, as well as the Old Teſtament in general (he ſaid), were writings not for Chriſtians but for Jews*." This declaration ſhews the ground upon which Marcion proceeded in his mutilation of the ſcriptures, viz. his diſlike of the paſſages or the books. Marcion flouriſhed about the year 130.

Dr. Lardner, in his General Review, ſums up this head of evidence in the following words: "Noetus, Paul of Samoſata, Sabellius, Marcellus, Photinus, the Novatians, Donatiſts, Manicheans†, Priſcillianiſts, beſide Artemon, the Audians, the Arians, and divers others, all received moſt or all

* I have tranſcribed this ſentence from Michaelis (p. 38), who has not, however, referred to the authority upon which he attributes theſe words to Marcion.

† This muſt be with an exception, however, of Fauſtus, who lived ſo late as the year 384.

the

the ſame books of the New Teſtament which the catholics received; and agreed in a like reſpect for them as writ by apoſtles, or their diſciples and companions*."

* Ib. vol. xii. p. 12.—Dr. Lardner's future enquiries ſupplied him with many other inſtances.

SECT.

SECT. VIII.

The four Goſpels, the Acts of the Apoſtles, thirteen Epiſtles of St. Paul, the firſt Epiſtle of John, and the firſt of Peter, were received without doubt by thoſe who doubted concerning the other books which are included in our preſent canon.

I STATE this propoſition, becauſe, if made out, it ſhews that the authenticity of their books was a ſubject amongſt the early Chriſtians of conſideration and enquiry; and that, where there was cauſe of doubt, they did doubt; a circumſtance which ſtrengthens very much their teſtimony to ſuch books as were received by them with full acquieſcence.

I. Jerome, in his account of Caius, who was probably a preſbyter of Rome, and who flouriſhed near the year 200, records of him, that, reckoning up only thirteen epiſtles

epiſtles of Paul, he ſays the fourteenth, which is inſcribed to the Hebrews, is not his; and then Jerome adds, "With the Romans to this day it is not looked upon as Paul's." This agrees in the main with the account given by Euſebius of the ſame ancient author and his work; except that Euſebius delivers his own remark in more guarded terms, "And indeed to this very time, by *ſome* of the Romans, this epiſtle is not thought to be the apoſtle's*."

II. Origen, about twenty years after Caius, quoting the epiſtle to the Hebrews, obſerves that ſome might diſpute the authority of that epiſtle, and therefore proceeds to quote to the ſame point, as *undoubted* books of ſcripture, the Goſpel of St. Matthew, the Acts of the Apoſtles, and Paul's firſt Epiſtle to the Theſſalonians†. And in another place, this author ſpeaks of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews thus:—"The account come down to us is various, ſome

* Ib. vol. iii. p. 240.

† Ib. p. 246.

ſaying

ſaying that Clement, who was biſhop of Rome, wrote this epiſtle; others, that it was Luke, the ſame who writ the Goſpel and the Acts." Speaking alſo in the ſame paragraph of Peter, "Peter (ſays he) has left one epiſtle acknowledged; let it be granted likewiſe that he wrote a ſecond, for it is doubted of." And of John, "He has alſo left one epiſtle, of a very few lines; grant alſo a ſecond and a third, for all do not allow theſe to be genuine." Now let it be noted, that Origen, who thus diſcriminates, and thus confeſſes his own doubts, and the doubts which ſubſiſted in his time, expreſſly witneſſes concerning the four goſpels, "that they alone are received without diſpute by the whole church of God under heaven *."

III. Dionyſius of Alexandria, in the year 247, doubts concerning the Book of Revelation, whether it was written by St. John; ſtates the grounds of his doubt; repreſents the diverſity of opinion concerning it, in his

* Ib. vol. iii. p. 234.

own

own time, and before his time *." Yet the ſame Dionyſius uſes and collates the four goſpels, in a manner which ſhews that he entertained not the ſmalleſt ſuſpicion of *their* authority, and in a manner alſo which ſhews that they, and they alone, were received as authentic hiſtories of Chriſt †.

IV. But this ſection may be ſaid to have been framed on purpoſe to introduce to the reader two remarkable paſſages, extant in Euſebius's eccleſiaſtical hiſtory. The firſt paſſage opens with theſe words—"Let us obſerve the writings of the Apoſtle John which are *uncontradicted*; and firſt of all muſt be mentioned, as acknowledged of all, the goſpel according to him, well known to all the churches under heaven." The author then proceeds to relate the occaſions of writing the goſpels, and the reaſons for placing St. John's the laſt, manifeſtly ſpeaking of all the four as parallel in their authority, and in the certainty of their original ‡. The

* Ib. vol. iv. p. 670. † Ib. p. 661.
‡ Ib. vol. viii. p. 90.

ſecond

ſecond paſſage is taken from a chapter, the title of which is, " Of the Scriptures *univerſally acknowledged*, and of thoſe that are not ſuch." Euſebius begins his enumeration in the following manner:—" *In the firſt place* are to be ranked the ſacred four Goſpels, then the book of the Acts of the Apoſtles: after that are to be reckoned the Epiſtles of Paul. In the next place, that called the firſt Epiſtle of John, and the Epiſtle of Peter, are to be eſteemed authentic. After this is to be placed, if it be thought fit, the Revelation of John, about which we ſhall obſerve the different opinions at proper ſeaſons. Of the controverted, but yet well known, or approved by the moſt, are that called the Epiſtle of James, and that of Jude, and the ſecond of Peter, and the ſecond and third of John, whether they are written by the evangeliſt, or another of the ſame name*." He then proceeds to reckon up five others, not in our canon, which he calls in one place *ſpurious*, in another *controverted*, meaning, as appears to

* Ib. vol. viii. p. 89.

me,

me, nearly the ſame thing by theſe two words*.

It is manifeſt from this paſſage, that the four Goſpels, and the Acts of the Apoſtles, (the parts of ſcripture with which our concern principally lies) were acknowledged without diſpute, even by thoſe who raiſed objections, or entertained doubts, about ſome other parts of the ſame collection. But the paſſage proves ſomething more than this. The author was extremely converſant in the writings of Chriſtians, which had been publiſhed from the commencement of the inſtitution to his own time; and it was from theſe writings that he drew his knowledge of the character and reception of the books in queſtion. That Euſebius recurred to this

* That Euſebius could not intend, by the word rendered "ſpurious," what we at preſent mean by it, is evident from a clauſe in this very chapter, where, ſpeaking of the Goſpels of Peter and Thomas, and Matthias and ſome others, he ſays, "They are not ſo much as to be reckoned among the *ſpurious*, but are to be rejected as altogether abſurd and impious." Vol. viii. p. 98.

medium

medium of information, and that he had examined with attention this ſpecies of proof, is ſhewn, firſt, by a paſſage in the very chapter we are quoting, in which, ſpeaking of the books which he calls ſpurious, "None (he ſays) of the eccleſiaſtical writers, in the ſucceſſion of the apoſtles, have vouchſafed to make any mention of them in their writings;" and ſecondly, by another paſſage of the ſame work, wherein, ſpeaking of the firſt epiſtle of Peter, "This (he ſays) the preſbyters of ancient times have quoted in their writings as undoubtedly genuine *;" and then ſpeaking of ſome other writings bearing the name of Peter, "We know (he ſays) that they have not been delivered down to us in the number of catholic writings, foraſmuch as no eccleſiaſtical writer of the ancients, or of our times, has made uſe of teſtimonies out of them." "But in the progreſs of this hiſtory," the author proceeds, "we ſhall make it our buſineſs to ſhew, together with the ſucceſſions from the

* Ib. p. 99.

apoſtles, what eccleſiaſtical writers, in every age, have uſed ſuch writings as theſe which are contradicted, and what they have ſaid with regard to the ſcriptures received in the New Teſtament, *and acknowledged by all*, and with regard to thoſe which are not ſuch *."

After this it is reaſonable to believe, that, when Euſebius ſtates the four Goſpels, and the Acts of the Apoſtles, as uncontradicted, unconteſted, and acknowledged by all ; and when he places them in oppoſition, not only to thoſe which were ſpurious in our ſenſe of that term, but to thoſe which were controverted, and even to thoſe which were well known and approved by many, yet doubted of by ſome ; he repreſents not only the ſenſe of his own age, but the reſult of the evidence which the writings of prior ages, from the apoſtles' time to his own, had furniſhed to his enquiries. The opinion of Euſebius and his contemporaries appears to have been founded upon the teſtimony of writers,

* Ib. p. 111.

whom

whom they *then* called ancient: and we may obſerve, that ſuch of the works of theſe writers as have come down to our times, entirely confirm the judgement, and ſupport the diſtinction which Euſebius propoſes. The books which he calls "books univerſally acknowledged," are in fact uſed and quoted in the remaining works of Chriſtian writers, during the 250 years between the apoſtles' time and that of Euſebius, much more frequently than, and in a different manner from, thoſe, the authority of which, he tells us, was diſputed.

SECT. IX.

Our hiſtorical ſcriptures were attacked by the early adverſaries of Chriſtianity, as containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded.

I. NEAR the middle of the ſecond century, Celſus, a heathen philoſopher, wrote a profeſſed treatiſe againſt Chriſtianity. To this treatiſe, Origen, who came about fifty years after him, publiſhed an anſwer, in which he frequently recites his adverſary's words and arguments. The work of Celſus is loſt; but that of Origen remains. Origen appears to have given us the words of Celſus, where he profeſſes to give them, very faithfully; and, amongſt other reaſons for thinking ſo, this is one, that the objection, as ſtated by him from Celſus, is ſometimes ſtronger than his own anſwer. I think it alſo probable that Origen, in his anſwer, has retailed a large

a large portion of the work of Celſus: "That it may not be ſuſpected (he ſays) that we paſs by any chapters, becauſe we have no anſwers at hand, I have thought it beſt, according to my ability, to confute every thing propoſed by him, not ſo much obſerving the natural order of things, as the order which he has taken himſelf *."

Celſus wrote about 100 years after the Goſpels were publiſhed; and therefore any notices of theſe books from him are extremely important for their antiquity. They are, however, rendered more ſo by the character of the author; for the reception, credit, and notoriety of theſe books muſt have been well eſtabliſhed amongſt Chriſtians, to have made them ſubjects of animadverſion and oppoſition by ſtrangers and by enemies. It evinces the truth of what Chryſoſtom, two centuries afterwards, obſerved, that "the Goſpels, when written, were not hid in a corner or buried in obſcurity, but they were

* Or. cont. Celſ. l. i. ſect. 41.

made known to all the world, before enemies as well as others, even as they are now *."

1. Celſus, or the Jew whom he perſonates, uſes theſe words—"I could ſay many things concerning the affairs of Jeſus, and thoſe, too, different from thoſe written by the diſciples of Jeſus, but I purpoſely omit them†." Upon this paſſage it has been rightly obſerved, that it is not eaſy to believe, that if Celſus could have contradicted the diſciples upon good evidence in any material point, he would have omitted to do ſo; and that the aſſertion is, what Origen calls it, a mere oratorical flouriſh.

It is ſufficient however to prove, that, in the time of Celſus, there were books well known, and allowed to be written by the diſciples of Jeſus, which books contained a hiſtory of him. By the term *diſciple*, Celſus

* In Mat. hom. i. 7.

† Lardner's Jewiſh and Heathen Teſtim. vol. ii. p. 274.

does

does not mean the followers of Jeſus in general, for them he calls Chriſtians, or believers, or the like, but thoſe who had been taught by Jeſus himſelf, *i. e.* his apoſtles and companions.

2. In another paſſage, Celſus accuſes the Chriſtians of altering the goſpel*. The accuſation refers to ſome variations in the readings of particular paſſages; for Celſus goes on to object, that when they are preſſed hard, and one reading has been confuted, they diſown that, and fly to another. We cannot perceive from Origen that Celſus ſpecified any particular inſtances, and without ſuch ſpecification the charge is of no value. But the true concluſion to be drawn from it is, that there were in the hands of the Chriſtians, hiſtories, which were even then of ſome ſtanding; for various readings and corruptions do not take place in recent productions.

The former quotation, the reader will

* Ib. p. 275.

remember, proved that these books were composed by the disciples of Jesus, strictly so called; the present quotation shews, that, though objections were taken by the adversaries of the religion to the integrity of these books, none were made to their genuineness.

3. In a third passage, the Jew, whom Celsus introduces, shuts up an argument in this manner:—"These things then we have alledged to you out of *your own writings*, not needing any other weapons*." It is manifest that this boast proceeds upon the supposition that the books, over which the writer affects to triumph, possessed an authority by which Christians confessed themselves to be bound.

4. That the books to which Celsus refers were no other than our present Gospels, is made out by his allusions to various passages still found in these Gospels. Celsus takes notice of the *genealogies*, which fixes two of

* Ib. p. 276.

these

theſe goſpels; of the precepts, Reſiſt not him that injures you, and, If a man ſtrike thee on the one cheek, offer to him the other alſo*; of the woes denounced by Chriſt; of his predictions; of his ſaying that it is impoſſible to ſerve two maſters†; of the purple robe, the crown of thorns, and the reed in his hand; of the blood that flowed from the body of Jeſus upon the croſs ‡, which circumſtance is recorded by John alone; and (what is inſtar omnium for the purpoſe for which we produce it) of the difference in the accounts given of the reſurrection by the evangeliſts, ſome mentioning two angels at the ſepulchre, others only one §.

It is extremely material to remark, that Celſus not only perpetually referred to the accounts of Chriſt contained in the four Goſpels ‖, but that he referred to no other accounts; that he founded none of his ob-

* Ib. p. 276. † Ib. p. 277. ‡ Ib. p. 280, 281.
§ Ib. p. 282.
‖ The particulars, of which the above are only a few, are well collected by Mr. Bryant, p. 140.

jections

jections to Chriſtianity upon any thing delivered in ſpurious goſpels.

II. What Celſus was in the ſecond century, Porphyry became in the third. His work, which was a large and formal treatiſe againſt the Chriſtian religion, is not extant. We muſt be content therefore to gather his objections from Chriſtian writers, who have noticed in order to anſwer them: and enough remains of this ſpecies of information, to prove completely, that Porphyry's animadverſions were directed againſt the contents of our preſent Goſpels, and of the Acts of the Apoſtles; Porphyry conſidering that to overthrow *them* was to overthrow the religion. Thus he objects to the repetition of a generation in St. Matthew's genealogy; to Matthew's call; to the quotation of a text from Iſaiah, which is found in a pſalm aſcribed to Aſaph; to the calling of the lake of Tiberias a ſea; to the expreſſion in St. Matthew, "the abomination of deſolation;" to the variation in Matthew and Mark upon the text "the voice of one crying in the

wilderneſs," Matthew citing it from Iſaias, Mark from the Prophets; to John's application of the term "Word;" to Chriſt's change of intention about going up to the feaſt of tabernacles (John vii. 8); to the judgement denounced by St. Peter upon Ananias and Sapphira, which he calls an imprecation of death*.

The inſtances here alledged ſerve, in ſome meaſure, to ſhew the nature of Porphyry's objections, and prove that Porphyry had read the Goſpels with that ſort of attention which a writer would employ who regarded them as the depoſitaries of the religion which he attacked. Beſide theſe ſpecifications, there exiſts in the writings of ancient Chriſtians general evidence, that the places of ſcripture upon which Porphyry had remarked were very numerous.

In ſome of the above cited examples, Porphyry, ſpeaking of St. Matthew, calls him

* Jewiſh and Heathen Teſt. vol. iii. p. 166 et ſeq.

your

your evangeliſt; he alſo uſes the term Evangeliſts in the plural number. What was ſaid of Celſus is true likewiſe of Porphyry, that it does not appear that he conſidered any hiſtory of Chriſt, except theſe, as having authority with Chriſtians.

III. A third great writer againſt the Chriſtian religion was the Emperor Julian, whoſe work was compoſed about a century after that of Porphyry.

In various long extracts, tranſcribed from this work by Cyril and Jerome, it appears*, that Julian noticed *by name* Matthew and Luke, in the difference between their genealogies of Chriſt; that he objected to Matthew's application of the prophecy, "Out of Egypt have I called my ſon" (ii. 15), and to that of "a virgin ſhall conceive" (i. 22); that he recited ſayings of Chriſt, and various paſſages of his hiſtory, in the very words of the evangeliſts; in particular, that

* Ib. vol. iv. p. 77 et ſeq.

Jeſus

Jeſus healed lame and blind people, and exorciſed demoniacs, in the villages of Bethſaida, and Bethany: that he alledged that none of Chriſt's diſciples aſcribed to him the creation of the world, except John; that neither Paul, nor Matthew, nor Luke, nor Mark, have dared to call Jeſus, God; that John wrote later than the other evangeliſts, and at a time when a great number of men in the cities of Greece and Italy were converted; that he alludes to the converſion of Cornelius and of Sergius Paulus, to Peter's viſion, to the circular letter ſent by the apoſtles and elders at Jeruſalem, which are all recorded in the Acts of the Apoſtles: by which quoting of the four Goſpels and the Acts of the Apoſtles, and by quoting no other, Julian ſhews that theſe were the hiſtorical books, and the only hiſtorical books, received by Chriſtians as of authority, and as the authentic memoirs of Jeſus Chriſt, of his apoſtles, and of the doctrines taught by them. But Julian's teſtimony does ſomething more than repreſent the judgment of the Chriſtian church in his time. It diſcovers alſo his

own. He himſelf expreſsly ſtates the early date of theſe records: he calls them by the names which they now bear. He all along ſuppoſes, he nowhere attempts to queſtion, their genuineneſs.

The argument in favour of the books of the New Teſtament, drawn from the notice taken of their contents by the early writers againſt the religion, is very conſiderable. It proves that the accounts, which Chriſtians had then, were the accounts which we have now; that our preſent ſcriptures were theirs. It proves, moreover, that neither Celſus in the ſecond, Porphyry in the third, nor Julian in the fourth century, ſuſpected the authenticity of theſe books, or ever inſinuated that Chriſtians were miſtaken in the authors to whom they aſcribed them. Not one of them expreſſed an opinion upon this ſubject different from that which was held by Chriſtians. And when we conſider how much it would have availed them to have caſt a doubt upon this point, if they could; and how ready they ſhewed themſelves to be,

be, to take every advantage in their power; and that they were all men of learning and enquiry; their conceſſion, or rather their ſuffrage, upon the ſubject, is extremely valuable.

In the caſe of Porphyry, it is made ſtill ſtronger, by the conſideration that he did in fact ſupport himſelf by this ſpecies of objection, when he ſaw any room for it, or when his acuteneſs could ſupply any pretence for alledging it. The prophecy of Daniel he attacked upon this very ground of ſpurioufneſs, inſiſting that it was written after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and maintains his charge of forgery by ſome, far-fetched indeed, but very ſubtle criticiſms. Concerning the writings of the New Teſtament, no trace of this ſuſpicion is anywhere to be found in him*.

* Michaelis's Introduction to the New Teſtament, vol. i. p. 43. Marſh's Tranſlation.

SECT.

SECT. X.

Formal catalogues of authentic ſcriptures were publiſhed, in all which our preſent ſacred hiſtories were included.

THIS ſpecies of evidence comes later than the reſt; as it was not natural that catalogues of any particular claſs of books ſhould be put forth until Chriſtian writings became numerous; or until ſome writings ſhewed themſelves, claiming titles which did not belong to them, and thereby rendering it neceſſary to ſeparate books of authority from others. But, when it does appear, it is extremely ſatisfactory; the catalogues, though numerous, and made in countries at a wide diſtance from one another, differing very little, differing in nothing which is material, and all containing the four Goſpels. To this laſt article there is no exception.

I. In

I. In the writings of Origen which remain, and in ſome extracts preſerved by Euſebius, from works of his which are now loſt, there are enumerations of the books of ſcripture, in which the four Goſpels and the Acts of the Apoſtles are diſtinctly and honourably ſpecified, and in which no books appear beſide what are now received *. The reader, by this time, will eaſily recollect that the date of Origen's works is A. D. 230.

II. Athanaſius, about a century afterwards, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Teſtament in form, containing our ſcriptures and no others; of which he ſays, "In theſe alone the doctrine of religion is taught; let no man add to them, or take any thing from them †."

III. About 20 years after Athanaſius, Cyril, biſhop of Jeruſalem, ſet forth a catalogue of the books of ſcripture, publicly

* Lardner's Cred. vol. iii. p. 234 et ſeq. vol. viii. p. 196.

† Ib. vol. viii. p. 223.

read at that time in the church of Jeruſalem, exactly the ſame as ours, except that the "Revelation" is omitted *.

IV. And, fifteen years after Cyril, the Council of Laodicea delivered an authoritative catalogue of canonical ſcripture, like Cyril's, the ſame as ours, with the omiſſion of the "Revelation."

V. Catalogues now become frequent. Within thirty years after the laſt date, that is, from the year 363 to near the concluſion of the fourth century, we have catalogues by Epiphanius †, by Gregory Nazianzen ‡, by Philaſter biſhop of Breicia in Italy §, by Amphilochius biſhop of Iconium, all, as they are ſometimes called, *clean* catalogues (that is, they admit no books into the number beſide what we now receive), and all, for every purpoſe of hiſtoric evidence, the ſame as ours ‖.

VI. Within

* Ib. vol. viii. p. 270. † Ib. p. 368.
‡ Ib. vol. ix. p. 132. § Ib. p. 373.
‖ Epiphanius omits the Acts of the Apoſtles. This muſt

VI. Within the ſame period, Jerome, the moſt learned Chriſtian writer of his age, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Teſtament, recognizing every book now received, with the intimation of a doubt concerning the Epiſtle to the Hebrews alone, and taking not the leaſt notice of any book which is not now received *.

VII. Contemporary with Jerome, who lived in Paleſtine, was St. Auguſtine in Africa, who publiſhed likewiſe a catalogue, without joining to the ſcriptures, as books of authority, any other eccleſiaſtical writing whatever, and without omitting one which we at this day acknowledge †.

VIII. And with theſe concurs another contemporary writer, Rufen, preſbyter of Aquileia, whoſe catalogue, like theirs, is perfect and unmixed, and concludes with

muſt have been an accidental miſtake, either in him, or in ſome copyiſt of his work; for he elſewhere expreſsly refers to this book, and aſcribes it to Luke.

* Ib. vol. x. p. 77. † Ib. p. 213.

these remarkable words: "These are the volumes which the Fathers have included in the canon, and out of which they would have us prove the doctrine of our faith*."

* Ib. vol. x. p. 187.

SECT.

SECT. XI.

These propositions cannot be predicated of any of those books which are commonly called apocryphal books of the New Testament.

I Do not know that the objection taken from apocryphal writings is at present much relied upon by scholars. But there are many, who, hearing that various gospels existed in ancient times under the names of the apostles, may have taken up a notion, that the selection of our present gospels from the rest, was rather an arbitrary or accidental choice, than founded in any clear and certain cause of preference. To these it may be very useful to know the truth of the case. I observe therefore,

I. That, beside our Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, no Christian history, claim-

ing to be written by an apoſtle or apoſtolical man, is quoted within three hundred years after the birth of Chriſt, by any writer now extant, or known; or, if quoted, is not quoted with marks of cenſure and rejection.

I have not advanced this aſſertion without enquiry: and I doubt not, but that the paſſages cited by Mr. Jones and Dr. Lardner, under the ſeveral titles which the apocryphal books bear; or a reference to the places where they are mentioned, as collected in a very accurate table, publiſhed in the year 1773 by the Rev. J. Atkinſon; will make out the truth of the propoſition to the ſatisfaction of every fair and competent judgment. If there be any book which may ſeem to form an exception to the obſervation, it is a Hebrew Goſpel, which was circulated under the various titles of the Goſpel according to the Hebrews, the Goſpel of the Nazarenes, of the Ebionites, ſometimes called of the Twelve, by ſome aſcribed to St. Matthew. This Goſpel is *once*, and only

once,

once, cited by Clement Alexandrinus, who lived, the reader will remember, in the latter part of the ſecond century, and which ſame Clement quotes one or other of our four Goſpels in almoſt every page of his work. It is alſo twice mentioned by Origen, A. D. 230; and both times with marks of diminution and diſcredit. And this is the ground upon which the exception ſtands. But what is ſtill more material to obſerve, is, that this Goſpel, in the main, agreed with our preſent Goſpel of St. Matthew*.

Now if, with this account of the apocryphal Goſpels, we compare what we have read concerning the canonical ſcriptures in the preceding ſections; or even recollect that general, but well-founded, aſſertion of Dr. Lardner, "That in the remaining works of Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria

* In applying to this Goſpel, what Jerome in the latter end of the fourth century has mentioned of a Hebrew Goſpel, I think it probable that we ſometimes confound it with a Hebrew copy of St. Matthew's Goſpel, whether an original or verſion, which was then extant.

and Tertullian, who all lived in the two firſt centuries, there are more, and larger quotations of the ſmall volume of the New Teſtament, than of all the works of Cicero, by writers of all characters, for ſeveral ages* ;" and if to this we add, that, notwithſtanding the loſs of many works of the primitive times of Chriſtianity, we have, within the above-mentioned period, the remains of Chriſtian writers, who lived in Paleſtine, Syria, Aſia Minor, Egypt, the part of Africa that uſed the Latin tongue, in Crete, Greece, Italy and Gaul, in all which remains references are found to our evangeliſts ; I apprehend, that we ſhall perceive a clear and broad line of diviſion, between thoſe writings, and all others pretending to a ſimilar authority

II. But beſide certain *hiſtories* which aſſumed the names of Apoſtles, and which were forgeries properly ſo called, there were ſome other Chriſtian writings, in the whole or in part of an hiſtorical nature, which,

* Lard. Cred. vol. xii. p. 53.

though

though not forgeries, are denominated apocryphal, as being of uncertain or of no authority.

Of this ſecond claſs of writings I have found only two which are noticed by any author of the three firſt centuries, without expreſs terms of condemnation; and theſe are, the one, a book entitled the Preaching of Peter, quoted repeatedly by Clement Alexandrinus, A. D. 196; the other, a book entitled the Revelation of Peter, upon which the above-mentioned Clement Alexandrinus is ſaid, by Euſebius, to have written notes; and which is twice cited in a work ſtill extant, aſcribed to the ſame author.

I conceive therefore, that the propoſition we have before advanced, even after it hath been ſubjected to every exception, of every kind, that can be alledged, ſeparates, by a wide interval, our hiſtorical ſcriptures from all other writings which profeſs to give an account of the ſame ſubject.

We

We may be permitted however to add,

1. That there is no evidence, that any ſpurious or apocryphal books whatever exiſted in the firſt century of the Chriſtian æra; in which century all our hiſtorical books are proved to have been extant. "There are no quotations of any ſuch books in the apoſtolical fathers, by whom I mean Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius and Polycarp, whoſe writings reach from about the year of our Lord 70, to the year 108;" (and ſome of whom have quoted each and every one of our hiſtorical ſcriptures) "I ſay this," adds Dr. Lardner, "becauſe I think it has been proved*."

2. Theſe apocryphal writings were not read in the churches of Chriſtians;

3. Were not admitted into their volume;

4. Do not appear in their catalogues;

* Ib. vol. xii. p. 158.

5. Were

5. Were not noticed by their adverſaries;

6. Were not alledged by different parties, as of authority in their controverſies;

7. Were not the ſubjects amongſt them, of commentaries, verſions, collations, expoſitions.

Finally; beſide the ſilence of three centuries, or evidence, within that time, of their rejection, they were, with a conſent nearly univerſal, reprobated by Chriſtian writers of ſucceeding ages.

Although it be made out by theſe obſervations, that the books in queſtion never obtained any degree of credit and notoriety, which can place them in competition with our ſcriptures, yet it appears from the writings of the fourth century, that many ſuch exiſted in that century, and in the century preceding it. It may be difficult at this diſtance of time to account for their origin. Perhaps the moſt probable explication is, that

that they were in general compoſed with a deſign of making a profit by the ſale. Whatever treated of the ſubject would find purchaſers. It was an advantage taken of the pious curioſity of unlearned Chriſtians. With a view to the ſame purpoſe, they were many of them adapted to the particular opinions of particular ſects, which would naturally promote their circulation amongſt the favourers of thoſe opinions. After all, they were probably much more obſcure than we imagine. Except the Goſpel according to the Hebrews, there is none, of which we hear more, than the Goſpel of the Egyptians; yet there is good reaſon to believe that Clement, a preſbyter of Alexandria in Egypt A. D. 184, and a man of almoſt univerſal reading, had never ſeen it*. A Goſpel according to Peter, was another of the moſt ancient books of this kind; yet Serapion, biſhop of Antioch, A. D. 200, had not read it, when he heard of ſuch a book being in the hands of the Chriſtians of Rhoſſus in Cilicia; and ſpeaks of obtaining

* Jones, vol. i. p. 243.

a ſight

a ſight of this Goſpel from ſome ſectaries who uſed it *. Even of the Goſpel of the Hebrews, which confeſſedly ſtands at the head of the catalogue, Jerome, at the end of the fourth century, was glad to procure a copy by the favour of the Nazareans of Berea. Nothing of this ſort ever happened, or could have happened, concerning our Goſpels.

One thing is obſervable of all the apocryphal Chriſtian writings, viz. that they proceed upon the ſame fundamental hiſtory of Chriſt and his apoſtles, as that which is diſcloſed in our ſcriptures. The miſſion of Chriſt, his power of working miracles, his communication of that power to the apoſtles, his paſſion, death and reſurrection, are aſſumed or aſſerted by every one of them. The names under which ſome of them came forth, are the names of men of eminence in our hiſtories. What theſe books give, are not contradictions, but unauthoriſed addi-

* Lard. Cred. vol. ii. p. 557.

tions. The principal facts are ſuppoſed, the principal agents the ſame; which ſhews that theſe points were too much fixed to be altered or diſputed.

If there be any book of this deſcription, which appears to have impoſed upon ſome conſiderable number of learned Chriſtians, it is the Sybilline oracles; but, when we reflect upon the circumſtances which facilitated that impoſture, we ſhall ceaſe to wonder either at the attempt, or its ſucceſs. It was at that time univerſally underſtood that ſuch a prophetic writing exiſted. Its contents were kept ſecret. This ſituation afforded to ſome one a hint, as well as an opportunity, to give out a writing under this name, favourable to the already eſtabliſhed perſuaſion of Chriſtians, and which writing, by the aid and recommendation of theſe circumſtances, would in ſome degree, it is probable, be received. Of the ancient forgery we know but little; what is now produced could not, in my opinion, have impoſed upon any one. It is nothing elſe than the goſpel hiſtory,

hiſtory, woven into verſe; perhaps was at firſt, rather a fiction, than a forgery; an exerciſe of ingenuity more than an attempt to deceive.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

Recapitulation.

THE reader will now be pleaſed to recollect, that the two points which form the ſubject of our preſent diſcuſſion, are, firſt, that the founder of Chriſtianity, his aſſociates, and immediate followers, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings; ſecondly, that they did ſo, in atteſtation of the miraculous hiſtory recorded in our ſcriptures, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of that hiſtory.

The argument, by which theſe two propoſitions have been maintained by us, ſtands thus:

No hiſtorical fact, I apprehend, is more certain, than that the original propagators of Chriſtianity voluntarily ſubjected themſelves to lives of fatigue, danger, and ſuffering, in the proſecution of their undertaking. The nature

nature of the undertaking; the character of the perſons employed in it; the oppoſition of their tenets to the fixed opinions and expectations of the country, in which they firſt advanced them; their undiſſembled condemnation of the religion of all other countries; their total want of power, authority, or force, render it in the higheſt degree probable that this muſt have been the caſe. The probability is increaſed, by what we know of the fate of the founder of the inſtitution, who was put to death for his attempt; and by what we alſo know of the cruel treatment of the converts to the inſtitution, within thirty years after its commencement: both which points are atteſted by heathen writers, and, being once admitted, leave it very incredible that the primitive emiſſaries of the religion, who exerciſed their miniſtry, firſt, amongſt the people who had deſtroyed their maſter, and, afterwards, amongſt thoſe who perſecuted their converts, ſhould themſelves eſcape with impunity, or purſue their purpoſe in eaſe and ſafety. This probabi-

lity, thus ſuſtained by foreign teſtimony, is advanced, I think, to hiſtorical certainty, by the evidence of our own books; by the accounts of a writer who was the companion of the perſons whoſe ſufferings he relates; by the letters of the perſons themſelves; by predictions of perſecutions aſcribed to the founder of the religion, which predictions would not have been inſerted in his hiſtory, much leſs have been ſtudiouſly dwelt upon, if they had not accorded with the event, and which, even if falſely aſcribed to him, could only have been ſo aſcribed, becauſe the event ſuggeſted them; laſtly, by inceſſant exhortations to fortitude and patience, and by an earneſtneſs, repetition, and urgency upon the ſubject, which were unlikely to have appeared, if there had not been, at the time, ſome extraordinary call for the exerciſe of theſe virtues.

It is made out alſo, I think, with ſufficient evidence, that both the teachers and converts of the religion, in conſequence of their

their new profeſſion, took up a new courſe of life and behaviour.

The next great queſtion is, what they did this FOR. That it was *for* a miraculous ſtory of ſome kind or other, is to my apprehenſion extremely manifeſt; becauſe, as to the fundamental article, the deſignation of the perſon, viz. that this particular perſon, Jeſus of Nazareth, ought to be received as the Meſſiah, or as a meſſenger from God, they neither had, nor could have, any thing but miracles to ſtand upon. That the exertions and ſufferings of the apoſtles were *for* the ſtory which we have now, is proved by the conſideration that this ſtory is tranſmitted to us by two of their own number, and by two others perſonally connected with them; that the particularity of the narrative proves, that the writers claimed to poſſeſs circumſtantial information, that from their ſituation they had full opportunity of acquiring ſuch information, that they certainly, at leaſt, knew what their colleagues,

their companions, their maſters taught; that each of theſe books contains enough to prove the truth of the religion; that, if any one of them therefore be genuine, it is ſufficient; that the genuineneſs however of all of them is made out, as well by the general arguments which evince the genuineneſs of the moſt undiſputed remains of antiquity, as alſo by peculiar and ſpecific proofs, viz. by citations from them in writings belonging to a period immediately contiguous to that in which they were publiſhed; by the diſtinguiſhed regard paid by early Chriſtians to the authority of theſe books (which regard was manifeſted by their collecting of them into a volume, appropriating to that volume titles of peculiar reſpect, tranſlating them into various languages, digeſting them into harmonies, writing commentaries upon them, and, ſtill more conſpicuouſly, by the reading of them in their public aſſemblies in all parts of the world); by an univerſal agreement with reſpect to *theſe* books, whilſt doubts were entertained concerning ſome others;

others; by contending ſects appealing to them; by the early adverſaries of the religion not diſputing their genuineneſs, but, on the contrary, treating them as the depoſitaries of the hiſtory upon which the religion was founded; by many formal catalogues of theſe, as of certain and authoritative writings, publiſhed in different and diſtant parts of the Chriſtian world; laſtly, by the abſence or defect of the above-cited topics of evidence, when applied to any other hiſtories of the ſame ſubject.

Theſe are ſtrong arguments to prove, that the books actually proceeded from the authors whoſe names they bear (and have always borne, for there is not a particle of evidence to ſhew that they ever went under any other); but the ſtrict genuineneſs of the books is perhaps more than is neceſſary to the ſupport of our propoſition. For even ſuppoſing that, by reaſon of the ſilence of antiquity, or the loſs of records, we knew not who were the writers of the four Go-

ſpels, yet the fact, that they were received as authentic accounts of the tranſaction upon which the religion reſted, and were received as ſuch by Chriſtians at or near the age of the apoſtles, by thoſe whom the apoſtles had taught, and by ſocieties which the apoſtles had founded; this fact, I ſay, connected with the conſideration, that they are corroborative of each other's teſtimony, and that they are farther corroborated by another contemporary hiſtory, taking up the ſtory where they had left it, and, in a narrative built upon that ſtory, accounting for the riſe and production of changes in the world, the effects of which ſubſiſt at this day; connected, moreover, with the confirmation which they receive, from letters written by the apoſtles themſelves, which both aſſume the ſame general ſtory, and, as often as occaſions lead them to do ſo, allude to particular parts of it; and connected alſo with the reflection, that if the apoſtles delivered any different ſtory, it is loſt (the preſent and no other being referred to by a

ſeries

ſeries of Chriſtian writers, down from their age to our own; being likewiſe recognized in a variety of inſtitutions, which prevailed, early and univerſally, amongſt the diſciples of the religion); and that ſo great a change, as the oblivion of one ſtory and the ſubſtitution of another, under ſuch circumſtances, could not have taken place; this evidence would be deemed, I apprehend, ſufficient to prove concerning theſe books, that, whoever were the authors of them, they exhibit the ſtory which the apoſtles told, and for which, conſequently, they acted, and they ſuffered.

If it be ſo, the religion muſt be true. Theſe men could not be deceivers. By only not bearing teſtimony, they might have avoided all their ſufferings, and have lived quietly. Would men in ſuch circumſtances pretend to have ſeen what they never ſaw; aſſert facts which they had no knowledge of; go about lying, to teach virtue; and, though not only convinced of Chriſt's be-

ing an impoſtor, but having ſeen the ſucceſs of his impoſture in his crucifixion, yet perſiſt in carrying it on; and ſo perſiſt, as to bring upon themſelves, for nothing, and with a full knowledge of the conſequence, enmity and hatred, danger and death?

Of

Of the Direct Hiſtorical Evidence of Chriſtianity.

PROP. II.

CHAP. I.

Our firſt propoſition was, "*That there is ſatisfactory evidence, that many, pretending to be original witneſſes of the Chriſtian miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers, and ſufferings, voluntarily undertaken and undergone, in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of thoſe accounts; and that they alſo ſubmitted, from the ſame motive, to new rules of conduct.*"

Our

Our ſecond propoſition, and which now remains to be treated of, is, "*That there is* NOT *ſatisfactory evidence, that perſons pretending to be original witneſſes of any other ſimilar miracles, have acted in the ſame manner, in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and ſolely in conſequence of their belief of the truth of thoſe accounts.*"

I ENTER upon this part of my argument, by declaring how far my belief in miraculous accounts goes. If the reformers in the time of Wickliff, or of Luther; or thoſe of England, in the time of Henry the Eighth, or of Queen Mary; or the founders of our religious ſects ſince, ſuch as were Mr. Whitfield and Mr. Weſley in our own times; had undergone the life of toil and exertion, of danger and ſufferings, which we know that many of them did undergo, *for* a miraculous ſtory; that is to ſay, if they had founded their public miniſtry upon the allegation of miracles wrought within their own knowledge, and upon narratives

ratives which could not be reſolved into deluſion or miſtake; and if it had appeared, that their conduct really had its origin in theſe accounts, I ſhould have believed them. Or, to borrow an inſtance which will be familiar to every one of my readers, if the late Mr. Howard had undertaken his labours and journies in atteſtation, and in conſequence of a clear and ſenſible miracle, I ſhould have believed him alſo. Or, to repreſent the ſame thing under a third ſuppoſition; if Socrates had profeſſed to perform public miracles at Athens; if the friends of Socrates, Phædo, Cebes, Crito, and Simmias, together with Plato, and many of his followers, relying upon the atteſtation which theſe miracles afforded to his pretenſions, had, at the hazard of their lives, and the certain expence of their eaſe and tranquillity, gone about Greece, after his death, to publiſh and propagate his doctrines; and if theſe things had come to our knowledge, in the ſame way as that in which the life of Socrates is now tranſmitted to us, through the hands of his companions and

and diſciples, that is, by writings received without doubt as theirs, from the age in which they were publiſhed to the preſent, I ſhould have believed this likewiſe. And my belief would, in each caſe, be much ſtrengthened, if the ſubject of the miſſion were of importance to the conduct and happineſs of human life; if it teſtifiſed any thing which it behoved mankind to know from ſuch authority; if the nature of what it delivered, required the ſort of proof which it alledged; if the occaſion was adequate to the interpoſition, the end worthy of the means. In the laſt caſe my faith would be much confirmed, if the effects of the tranſaction *remained*; more eſpecially, if a change had been wrought, at the time, in the opinion and conduct of ſuch numbers, as to lay the foundation of an inſtitution, and of a ſyſtem of doctrines, which had ſince overſpread the greateſt part of the civilized world. I ſhould have believed, I ſay, the teſtimony, in theſe caſes; yet none of them do more than come up to the apoſtolic hiſtory.

If

If any one chooſe to call aſſent to its evidence credulity, it is at leaſt incumbent upon him to produce examples in which the ſame evidence hath turned out to be fallacious. And this contains the preciſe queſtion which we are now to agitate.

In ſtating the compariſon between our evidence, and what our adverſaries may bring into competition with ours, we will divide the diſtinctions which we wiſh to propoſe into two kinds, thoſe which relate to the proof, and thoſe which relate to the miracles. Under the former head we may lay out of the caſe,

I. Such accounts of ſupernatural events as are found only in hiſtories by ſome ages poſterior to the tranſaction, and of which it is evident that the hiſtorian could know little more than his reader. Ours is contemporary hiſtory. This difference alone removes out of our way, the miraculous hiſtory of Pythagoras, who lived five hundred years before the Chriſtian æra, written by Porphyry and Jamblicus, who lived three

three hundred years after that æra; the prodigies of Livy's hiſtory; the fables of the heroic ages; the whole of the Greek and Roman, as well as of the Gothic mythology; a great part of the legendary hiſtory of Popiſh ſaints, the very beſt atteſted of which is extracted from the certificates that are exhibited during the proceſs of their canonization, a ceremony which ſeldom takes place till a century after their deaths. It applies alſo with conſiderable force to the miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, which are contained in a ſolitary hiſtory of his life, publiſhed by Philoſtratus, above a hundred years after his death; and in which, whether Philoſtratus had any prior account to guide him, depends upon his ſingle unſupported aſſertion. Alſo to ſome of the miracles of the third century, eſpecially to one extraordinary inſtance, the account of Gregory, biſhop of Neoceſarea, called Thaumaturgus, delivered in the writings of Gregory of Nyſſen, who lived one hundred and thirty years after the ſubject of his panegyric.

The

The value of this circumſtance is ſhewn to have been accurately exemplified in the hiſtory of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the order of Jeſuits *. His life, written by a companion of his, and by one of the order, was publiſhed about fifteen years after his death. In which life, the author, ſo far from aſcribing any miracles to Ignatius, induſtriouſly ſtates the reaſons why he was not inveſted with any ſuch power. The life was republiſhed fifteen years afterwards, with the addition of many circumſtances, which were the fruit, the author ſays, of further enquiry, and of diligent examination; but ſtill with a total ſilence about miracles. When Ignatius had been dead near ſixty years, the Jeſuits, conceiving a wiſh to have the founder of their order placed in the Roman calendar, began, as it ſhould ſeem, for the firſt time, to attribute to him a catalogue of miracles, which could not then be diſtinctly diſproved; and which there was, in thoſe who governed the church a ſtrong diſpoſition to admit upon the ſlendereſt proofs.

* Douglaſs's Criterion of Miracles, p. 74.

II. We

II. We may lay out of the caſe, accounts publiſhed in one country, of what paſſed in a diſtant country, without any proof that ſuch accounts were known or received at home. In the caſe of Chriſtianity, Judea, which was the ſcene of the tranſaction, was the centre of the miſſion. The ſtory was publiſhed in the place in which it was acted. The church of Chriſt was firſt planted at Jeruſalem itſelf. With that church others correſponded. From thence the primitive teachers of the inſtitution went forth; thither they aſſembled. The church of Jeruſalem, and the ſeveral churches of Judea, ſubſiſted from the beginning, and for many ages *; received alſo the ſame books, and the ſame accounts, as other churches did.

This diſtinction diſpoſes, amongſt others, of the above-mentioned miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, moſt of which are related to have been performed in India, no evidence remaining that either the miracles aſcribed

* The ſucceſſion of many eminent biſhops of Jeruſalem, in the three firſt centuries, is diſtinctly preſerved, as Alexander, A. D. 212, who ſucceeded Narciſſus, then 116 years old.

to him, or the hiſtory of thoſe miracles, were ever heard of in India. Thoſe of Francis Xavier, the Indian miſſionary, with many others of the Romiſh breviary, are liable to the ſame objection, viz. that the accounts of them were publiſhed at a vaſt diſtance from the ſuppoſed ſcene of the wonders*.

III. We lay out of the caſe *tranſient* rumours. Upon the firſt publication of an extraordinary account, or even of an article of ordinary intelligence, no one, who is not perſonally acquainted with the tranſaction, can know whether it be true or falſe, becauſe any man may publiſh any ſtory. It is in the future confirmation, or contradiction, of the account; in its permanency, or its diſappearance; its dying away into ſilence, or its increaſing in notoriety; its being followed up by ſubſequent accounts, and being repeated in different and independent accounts, that ſolid truth is diſtinguiſhed from fugitive lies. This diſtinction

* Doug. Crit. p. 84.

is altogether on the ſide of Chriſtianity. The ſtory did not drop. On the contrary, it was ſucceeded by a train of action and events dependent upon it. The accounts, which we have in our hands, were compoſed after the firſt reports muſt have ſubſided. They were followed by a train of writings upon the ſubject. The hiſtorical teſtimonies of the tranſaction were many and various, and connected with letters, diſcourſes, controverſies, apologies, ſucceſſively produced by the ſame tranſaction.

IV. We may lay out of the caſe what I call *naked* hiſtory. It has been ſaid, that if the prodigies of the Jewiſh hiſtory had been found only in fragments of Manetho, or Beroſus, we ſhould have paid no regard to them: and I am willing to admit this. If we knew nothing of the fact, but from the fragment; if we poſſeſſed no proof that theſe accounts had been credited and acted upon, from times, probably, as ancient as the accounts themſelves; if we had no viſible effects connected with the hiſtory, no ſub-

ſequent or collateral teſtimony to confirm it; under theſe circumſtances, I think that it would be undeſerving of credit. But this certainly is not our caſe. In appreciating the evidence of Chriſtianity, the books are to be combined with the inſtitution; with the prevalency of the religion at this day; with the time and place of its origin, which are acknowledged points; with the circumſtances of its riſe and progreſs, as collected from external hiſtory; with the fact of our preſent books being received by the votaries of the inſtitution from the beginning; with that of other books coming after theſe, filled with accounts of effects and conſequences reſulting from the tranſaction, or referring to the tranſaction, or built upon it; laſtly, with the conſideration of the number and variety of the books themſelves, the different writers from which they proceed, the different views with which they were written, ſo diſagreeing as to repel the ſuſpicion of confederacy, ſo agreeing as to ſhew that they were founded in a common original, *i. e.* in a ſtory ſubſtantially the ſame. Whe-

ther this proof be ſatisfactory or not, it is properly a cumulation of evidence, by no means a naked or ſolitary record.

V. A mark of hiſtorical truth, although only in a certain way, and to a certain degree, is *particularity*, in names, dates, places, circumſtances, and in the order of events preceding or following the tranſaction: of which kind, for inſtance, is the particularity in the deſcription of St. Paul's voyage and ſhipwreck, in the 27th chapter of the Acts, which no man, I think, can read without being convinced that the writer was there; and alſo in the account of the cure and examination of the blind man, in the ninth chapter of St. John's Goſpel, which bears every mark of perſonal knowledge on the part of the hiſtorian*. I do not deny that fiction has often the particularity of truth; but then it is of ſtudied and elaborate fiction, or of a formal attempt to deceive, that we obſerve this. Since, however, experience

† Both theſe chapters ought to be read for the ſake of this very obſervation.

proves

proves that particularity is not confined to truth, I have ſtated that it is a proof of truth only to a certain extent, *i. e.* it reduces the queſtion to this, whether we can depend or not upon the *probity* of the relator: which is a conſiderable advance in our preſent argument; for an expreſs attempt to deceive, in which caſe alone particularity can appear without truth, is charged upon the evangeliſts by few. If the hiſtorian acknowledge himſelf to have received his intelligence from others, the particularity of the narrative ſhews, primâ facie, the accuracy of his enquiries, and the fulneſs of his information. This remark belongs to St. Luke's hiſtory. Of the particularity which we alledge, many examples may be found in all the Goſpels. And it is very difficult to conceive, that ſuch numerous particularities, as are almoſt every where to be met with in the ſcriptures, ſhould be raiſed out of nothing, or be ſpun out of the imagination without any fact to go upon*.

It

* "There is always ſome truth where there are conſiderable particularities related; and they always

It is to be remarked, however, that this particularity is only to be looked for in direct hiſtory. It is not natural in references or alluſions, which yet, in other reſpects, often afford, as far as they go, the moſt unſuſpicious evidence.

VI. We lay out of the caſe ſuch ſtories of ſupernatural events, as require, on the part of the hearer, nothing more than an *otioſe* aſſent; ſtories upon which nothing depends, in which no intereſt is involved, nothing is to be done or changed in conſequence of believing them. Such ſtories are

ſeem to bear ſome proportion to one another. Thus there is a great want of the particulars, of time, place, and perſons, in Manetho's account of the Egyptian Dynaſties, Eteſias's of the Aſſyrian Kings, and thoſe which the technical chronologers have given of the ancient kingdoms of Greece; and, agreeably thereto, theſe accounts have much fiction and falſehood, with ſome truth: whereas Thucydides's Hiſtory of the Peloponneſian War, and Ceſar's of the War in Gaul, in both which the particulars of time, place, and perſons are mentioned, are univerſally eſteemed true to a great degree of exactneſs." Hartley, vol. ii. p. 109.

credited,

credited, if the careleſs aſſent that is given to them deſerve that name, more by the indolence of the hearer, than by his judgement; or, though not much credited, are paſſed from one to another without enquiry or reſiſtance. To this caſe, and to this caſe alone, belongs what is called the love of the marvellous. I have never known it carry men further. Men do not ſuffer perſecution from the love of the marvellous. Of the indifferent nature we are ſpeaking of, are moſt vulgar errors and popular ſuperſtitions: moſt, for inſtance, of the current reports of apparitions. Nothing depends upon their being true or falſe. But not, ſurely, of this kind were the alledged miracles of Chriſt and his apoſtles. They decided, if true, the moſt important queſtion upon which the human mind can fix its anxiety. They claimed to regulate the opinions of mankind, upon ſubjects in which they are not only deeply concerned, but uſually refractory and obſtinate. Men could not be utterly careleſs in ſuch a caſe as this. If a Jew took up the ſtory, he found his darling par-

tiality to his own nation and law wounded; if a Gentile, he found his idolatry and polytheism reprobated and condemned. Whoever entertained the account, whether Jew or Gentile, could not avoid the following reflection:—"If these things be true, I must give up the opinions and principles in which I have been brought up, the religion in which my fathers lived and died." It is not conceivable that a man should do this upon any idle report or frivolous account, or, indeed, without being fully satisfied and convinced of the truth and credibility of the narrative to which he trusted. But it did not stop at opinions. They who believed Christianity, acted upon it. Many made it the express business of their lives to publish the intelligence. It was required of those who admitted that intelligence, to change forthwith their conduct and their principles, to take up a different course of life, to part with their habits and gratifications, and begin a new set of rules and system of behaviour. The apostles, at least, were interested not to sacrifice their ease, their fortunes,

and

and their lives for an idle tale; multitudes beſide them were induced, by the ſame tale, to encounter oppoſition, danger, and ſufferings.

If it be ſaid, that the mere promiſe of a future ſtate would do all this; I anſwer, that the mere promiſe of a future ſtate, without any evidence to give credit or aſſurance to it, would do nothing. A few wandering fiſhermen talking of a reſurrection of the dead could produce no effect. If it be further ſaid, that men eaſily believe what they anxiouſly deſire, I again anſwer that, in my opinion, the very contrary of this is nearer to the truth. Anxiety of deſire, earneſtneſs of expectation, the vaſtneſs of an event, rather cauſes men to diſbelieve, to doubt, to dread a fallacy, to diſtruſt, and to examine. When our Lord's reſurrection was firſt reported to the apoſtles, they did not believe, we are told, for joy. This was natural, and is agreeable to experience.

VII. We have laid out of the caſe thoſe accounts

accounts which require no more than a ſimple aſſent; and we now alſo lay out of the caſe thoſe which come merely *in affirmance* of opinions already formed. This laſt circumſtance is of the utmoſt importance to notice well. It has long been obſerved, that Popiſh miracles happen in Popiſh countries; that they make no converts: which proves that ſtories are accepted, when they fall in with principles already fixed, with the public ſentiments, or with the ſentiments of a party already engaged on the ſide the miracle ſupports, which would not be attemped to be produced in the face of enemies, in oppoſition to reigning tenets or favourite prejudices, or when, if they be believed, the belief muſt draw men away from their preconceived and habitual opinions, from their modes of life and rules of action. In the former caſe, men may not only receive a miraculous account, but may both act and ſuffer on the ſide, and in the cauſe, which the miracle ſupports, yet not act or ſuffer *for* the miracle, but in purſuance of a prior perſuaſion. The miracle, like any other argument

argument which only confirms what was before believed, is admitted with little examination. In the moral, as in the natural world, it is *change* which requires a cauſe. Men are eaſily fortified in their old opinions, driven from them with great difficulty. Now, how does this apply to the Chriſtian hiſtory? The miracles, there recorded, were wrought in the midſt of enemies, under a government, a prieſthood, and a magiſtracy, decidedly and vehemently adverſe to them, and to the pretenſions which they ſupported. They were Proteſtant miracles in a Popiſh country: they were Popiſh miracles in the midſt of Proteſtants. They produced a change; they eſtabliſhed a ſociety upon the ſpot, adhering to the belief of them; they made converts, and thoſe who were converted, gave up to the teſtimony their moſt fixed opinions and moſt favourite prejudices. They who acted and ſuffered in the cauſe, acted and ſuffered *for* the miracles; for there was no anterior perſuaſion to induce them, no prior reverence, prejudice, or partiality, to take hold of. Jeſus had not one follower when

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he ſet up his claim. His miracles gave birth to his ſect. No part of this deſcription belongs to the ordinary evidence of Heathen or Popiſh miracles. Even moſt of the miracles alledged to have been performed by Chriſtians, in the ſecond and third century of its æra, want this confirmation. It conſtitutes indeed a line of partition between the *origin* and the *progreſs* of Chriſtianity. Frauds and fallacies might mix themſelves with the progreſs, which could not poſſibly take place in the commencement of the religion; at leaſt, according to any laws of human conduct that we are acquainted with. What ſhould ſuggeſt to the firſt propagators or Chriſtianity, eſpecially to fiſhermen, taxgatherers, and huſbandmen, ſuch a thought as that of changing the religion of the world; what could bear them through the difficulties in which the attempt engaged them; what could procure any degree of ſucceſs to the attempt; are queſtions which apply, with great force, to the ſetting out of the inſtitution, with leſs, to every future ſtage of it.

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To hear ſome men talk, one would ſuppoſe the ſetting up of a religion by miracle to be a thing of every day's experience whereas the whole current of hiſtory i againſt it. Hath any founder of a new ſect amongſt Chriſtians pretended to miraculous powers, and ſucceeded by his pretenſions? "Were theſe powers claimed or exerciſed by the founders of the ſects of the Waldenſes and Albigenſes? Did Wickliff in England pretend to it? Did Huſs or Jerome in Bohemia? Did Luther in Germany, Zuinglius in Switzerland, Calvin in France, or any of the reformers advance this plea*?" The French prophets, in the beginning of the preſent century, ventured to alledge miraculous evidence, and immediately ruined their cauſe by their temerity. "Concerning the religion of Ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, of China, a ſingle miracle cannot be named, that was ever offered as a teſt of any of thoſe religions *before* their eſtabliſhment †."

* Campbell on Miracles, p. 100, ed. 1766.

† Adams on Mir. p. 75.

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We may add to what has been obſerved, of the diſtinction which we are conſidering, that, where miracles are alledged merely in affirmance of a prior opinion, they who believe the doctrine may ſometimes propagate a belief of the miracles which they do not themſelves entertain. This is the caſe of what are called *pious* frauds; but it is a caſe, I apprehend, which takes place ſolely in ſupport of a perſuaſion already eſtabliſhed. At leaſt it does not hold of the apoſtolical hiſtory. If the apoſtles did not believe the miracles, they did not believe the religion; and, without this belief, where was the *piety*, what place was there for any thing, which could bear the name or colour of piety, in publiſhing and atteſting miracles in its behalf? If it be ſaid that many promote the belief of revelation, and of any accounts which favour that belief, becauſe they think them, whether well or ill founded, of public and political utility, I anſwer, that if a character exiſt, which can with leſs juſtice than another be aſcribed to the founders of the Chriſtian religion, it is that of politicians, or

of

of men capable of entertaining political views. The truth is, that there is no aſſignable character, which will account for the conduct of the apoſtles, ſuppoſing their ſtory to be falſe. If bad men, what could have induced them to take ſuch pains to promote virtue? If good men, they would not have gone about the country with a ſtring of lies in their mouths.

In appreciating the credit of any miraculous ſtory, theſe are diſtinctions which relate to the evidence. There are other diſtinctions, of great moment in the queſtion, which relate to the miracles themſelves. Of which latter kind the following ought carefully to be retained.

I. It is not neceſſary to admit as a miracle, what can be reſolved into a *falſe perception*. Of this nature was the demon of Socrates; the viſions of St. Anthony, and of many others; the viſion which Lord Herbert of Cherbury deſcribes himſelf to have ſeen; Colonel Gardiner's viſion, as related in his life, written by

by Dr. Doddridge. All theſe may be accounted for by a momentary inſanity; for the characteriſtic ſymptom of human madneſs is the riſing up in the mind of images not diſtinguiſhable by the patient from impreſſions upon the ſenſes*. The caſes, however, in which the poſſibility of this deluſion exiſts, are divided from the caſes in which it does not exiſt, by many and thoſe not obſcure marks. They are, for the moſt part, caſes of viſions or voices. The object is hardly ever touched. The viſion ſubmits not to be handled. One ſenſe does not confirm another. They are likewiſe almoſt always caſes of a *ſolitary* witneſs. It is in the higheſt degree improbable, and I know not, indeed, whether it hath ever been the fact, that the ſame derangement of the mental organs ſhould ſeize different perſons at the ſame time; a derangement, I mean, ſo much the ſame, as to repreſent to their imagination the ſame objects. Laſtly, theſe are always caſes of *momentary* miracles;

* Batty on Lunacy.

by

by which term I mean to denote miracles of which the whole exiſtence is of ſhort duration, in contradiſtinction to miracles which are attended with permanent effects. The appearance of a ſpectre, the hearing of a ſupernatural ſound, is a momentary miracle. The ſenſible proof is gone, when the apparition or ſound is over. But if a perſon born blind be reſtored to ſight, a notorious cripple to the uſe of his limbs, or a dead man to life, here is a permanent effect produced by ſupernatural means. The change indeed was inſtantaneous, but the proof continues. The ſubject of the miracle remains. The man cured or reſtored is there: his former condition was known, and his preſent condition may be examined. This can by no poſſibility be reſolved into falſe perception: and of this kind are by far the greater part of the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament. When Lazarus was raiſed from the dead, he did not merely move, and ſpeak, and die again; or come out of the grave, and vaniſh away. He returned to his home and his family, and there con-

tinued; for we find him, ſome time afterwards, in the ſame town, ſitting at table with Jeſus and his ſiſters; viſited by great multitudes of the Jews, as a ſubject of curioſity; giving, by his preſence, ſo much uneaſineſs to the Jewiſh rulers as to beget in them a deſign of deſtroying him*. No deluſion can account for this. The French prophets in England, ſome time ſince, gave out that one of their teachers would come to life again, but their enthuſiaſm never made them believe that they actually ſaw him alive. The blind man whoſe reſtoration to ſight at Jeruſalem is recorded in the ninth chapter of St. John's goſpel, did not quit the place, or conceal himſelf from enquiry. On the contrary, he was forthcoming, to anſwer the call, to ſatisfy the ſcrutiny, and to ſuſtain the brow-beating of Chriſt's angry and powerful enemies. When the cripple at the gate of the temple was ſuddenly cured by Peter †, he did not immediately relapſe into his former lameneſs, or diſappear out of the

* John xii. 1, 2. 9, 10. † Acts iii. 2.

city; but boldly and honeſtly produced himſelf along with the apoſtles, when they were brought the next day before the Jewiſh council *. Here, though the miracle was ſudden, the proof was permanent. The lameneſs had been notorious, the cure continued. This, therefore, could not be the effect of any momentary delirium, either in the ſubject or in the witneſſes of the tranſaction. It is the ſame with the greateſt number of the ſcripture miracles. There are other caſes of a *mixed* nature, in which, although the principal miracle be momentary, ſome circumſtance combined with it is permanent. Of this kind is the hiſtory of St. Paul's converſion †. The ſudden light and ſound, the viſion, and the voice, upon the road to Damaſcus, were momentary: but Paul's blindneſs for three days in conſequence of what had happened; the communication made to Ananias in another place, and by a viſion independent of the former; Ananias finding out Paul in con-

* Acts iv. 14. † Ib. ix.

quence of intelligence ſo received, and finding him in the condition deſcribed, and Paul's recovery of his ſight upon Ananias laying his hands upon him; are circumſtances, which take the tranſaction, and the principal miracle as included in it, entirely out of the caſe of momentary miracles, or of ſuch as may be accounted for by falſe perceptions. Exactly the ſame thing may be obſerved of Peter's viſion preparatory to the call of Cornelius, and of its connection with what was imparted in a diſtant place to Cornelius himſelf, and with the meſſage diſpatched by Cornelius to Peter. The viſion might be a dream; the meſſage could not. Either communication, taken ſeparately, might be a deluſion; the concurrence of the two was impoſſible to happen without a ſupernatural cauſe.

Beſide the riſk of deluſion, which attaches upon momentary miracles, there is alſo much more room for *impoſture*. The account cannot be examined at the moment. And, when that is alſo a moment of hurry and confuſion,

confuſion, it may not be difficult for men of influence to gain credit to any ſtory which they may wiſh to have believed. This is preciſely the caſe of one of the beſt atteſted of the miracles of old Rome, the appearance of Caſtor and Pollux in the battle fought by Poſthumius with the Latins at the Lake Regillus. There is no doubt but that Poſthumius, after the battle, ſpread the report of ſuch an appearance. No perſon could deny it, whilſt it was ſaid to laſt. No perſon, perhaps, had any inclination to diſpute it afterwards; or, if they had, could ſay with poſitiveneſs, what was, or what was not ſeen, by ſome one or other of the army, in the diſmay and amidſt the tumult of a battle.

In aſſigning falſe perceptions, as the origin to which ſome miraculous accounts may be referred, I have not mentioned claims to inſpiration, illuminations, ſecret notices or directions, internal ſenſations, or conſciouſneſſes of being acted upon by ſpiritual influences, good or bad; becauſe theſe, appealing to no external proof, however convincing

they may be to the perſons themſelves, form no part of what can be accounted miraculous evidence. Their own credibility ſtands upon their alliance with other miracles. The diſcuſſion, therefore, of all ſuch pretenſions may be omitted.

II. It is not neceſſary to bring into the compariſon what may be called *tentative* miracles; that is, where, out of a great number of trials, ſome ſucceed; and in the accounts of which, although the narrative of the ſucceſsful caſes be alone preſerved, and that of the unſucceſsful caſes ſunk, yet enough is ſtated to ſhew that the caſes produced are only a few out of many in which the ſame means have been employed. This obſervation bears, with conſiderable force, upon the ancient oracles and auguries, in which a ſingle coincidence of the event with the prediction is talked of and magnified, whilſt failures are forgotten, or ſuppreſſed, or accounted for. It is alſo applicable to the cures wrought by relics, and at the tombs of ſaints. The boaſted efficacy of the king's touch,

touch, upon which Mr. Hume lays ſome ſtreſs, falls under the ſame deſcription. Nothing is alledged concerning it, which is not alledged of various noſtrums, namely, out of many thouſands who have uſed them, certified proofs of a few who have recovered after them. No ſolution of this ſort is applicable to the miracles of the goſpel. There is nothing in the narrative which can induce, or even allow, us to believe, that Chriſt attempted cures in many inſtances, and ſucceeded in a few; or that he ever made the attempt in vain. He did not profeſs to heal every where all that were ſick; on the contrary, he told the Jews, evidently meaning to repreſent his own caſe, that, "although many widows were in Iſrael in the days of Elias, when the heaven was ſhut up three years and ſix months, when great famine was throughout all the land, yet unto none of them was Elias ſent, ſave unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow:" and that "many lepers were in Iſrael in the time of Eliſeus the prophet, and none of them was cleanſed ſaving Naaman

the Syrian*." By which examples he gave them to underſtand, that it was not the nature of a divine interpoſition, or neceſſary to its purpoſe, to be general; ſtill leſs, to anſwer every challenge that might be made, which would teach men to put their faith upon theſe experiments. Chriſt never pronounced the word but the effect followed†. It was not a thouſand ſick that received his benediction, and a few that were benefited: a ſingle paralytic is let down in his bed at Jeſus's feet, in the midſt of a ſurrounding multitude; Jeſus bid him walk, and he did

* Luke iv. 25.

† One, and only one, inſtance may be produced in which the *diſciples* of Chriſt do ſeem to have attempted a cure, and not to have been able to perform it. The ſtory is very ingenuouſly related by three of the evangeliſts‡. The patient was afterwards healed by Chriſt himſelf; and the whole tranſaction ſeems to have been intended, as it was well ſuited, to diſplay the ſuperiority of Chriſt above all who performed miracles in his name; a diſtinction which, during his preſence in the world, it might be neceſſary to inculcate by ſome ſuch proof as this.

‡ Mark ix. 14. Mat. xvi. 20.

ſo.

ſo*. A man with a withered hand is in the ſynagogue; Jeſus bid him ſtretch forth his hand, in the preſence of the aſſembly, and it was "reſtored whole like the other†." There was nothing tentative in theſe cures; nothing that can be explained by the power of accident.

We may obſerve alſo, that many of the cures which Chriſt wrought, ſuch as that of a perſon blind from his birth, alſo many miracles beſides cures, as raiſing the dead, walking upon the ſea, feeding a great multitude with a few loaves and fiſhes, are of a nature which does not in any wiſe admit of the ſuppoſition of a fortunate experiment.

III. We may diſmiſs from the queſtion all accounts in which, allowing the phenomenon to be real, the fact to be true, it ſtill remains *doubtful* whether a miracle were wrought. This is the caſe with the ancient hiſtory of what is called the thundering

* Mark ii. 3. † Mat. xii. 10.

legion, of the extraordinary circumſtances which obſtructed the rebuilding of the temple at Jeruſalem by Julian, the circling of the flames and fragrant ſmell at the martyrdom of Polycarp, the ſudden ſhower that extinguiſhed the fire into which the ſcriptures were thrown in the Diocletian perſecution; Conſtantine's dream, his inſcribing in conſequence of it the croſs upon his ſtandard and the ſhields of his ſoldiers; his victory, and the eſcape of the ſtandard bearer; perhaps alſo the imagined appearance of the croſs in the heavens, though this laſt circumſtance is very deficient in hiſtorical evidence. It is alſo the caſe with the modern annual exhibition of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples. It is a doubt likewiſe, which ought to be excluded by very ſpecial circumſtances, from thoſe narratives which relate to the ſupernatural cure of hypochondriacal and nervous complaints, and of all diſeaſes which are much affected by the imagination. The miracles of the ſecond and third century are, uſually, healing the ſick, and caſting out evil ſpirits,

miracles

miracles in which there is room for ſome error and deception. We hear nothing of cauſing the blind to ſee, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the lepers to be cleanſed*. There are alſo inſtances in Chriſtian writers, of reputed miracles, which were natural operations, though not known to be ſuch at the time, as that of articulate ſpeech after the loſs of a great part of the tongue.

IV. To the ſame head of objection nearly, may alſo be referred accounts in which the variation of a ſmall circumſtance may have transformed ſome extraordinary appearance, or ſome critical coincidence of events, into a miracle; ſtories, in a word, which may be reſolved into exaggeration. The miracles of the goſpel can by no poſſibility be explained away in this manner. Total fiction will account for any thing; but no ſtretch of exaggeration that has any parallel in other hiſtories, no force of fancy upon real circumſtances, could produce the narratives which we now have. The feeding of the

* Jortin's Remarks, vol. ii. p. 51.

five

five thouſand with a few loaves and fiſhes ſurpaſſes all bounds of exaggeration. The raiſing of Lazarus, of the widow's ſon at Nain, as well as many other cures which Chriſt wrought, come not within the compaſs of miſrepreſentation. I mean that it is impoſſible to aſſign any poſition of circumſtances however peculiar, any accidental effects however extraordinary, any natural ſingularity, which could ſupply an origin or foundation to theſe accounts.

Having thus enumerated ſeveral exceptions which may juſtly be taken to relations of miracles, it is neceſſary, when we read the ſcriptures, to bear in our minds this general remark, that, although there be miracles recorded in the New Teſtament which fall within ſome or other of the exceptions here aſſigned, yet that they are united with others, to which none of the ſame exceptions extend, and that their credibility ſtands upon this union. Thus the viſions and revelations which St. Paul aſſerts to have been imparted to him, may not, in their ſeparate evidence, be diſtinguiſhable from the viſions

and

and revelations which many others have alledged. But here is the difference. St. Paul's pretenſions were atteſted by external miracles wrought by himſelf, and by miracles wrought in the cauſe to which theſe viſions relate; or, to ſpeak more properly, the ſame hiſtorical authority, which informs us of one, informs us of the other. This is not ordinarily true of the viſions of enthuſiaſts, or even of the accounts in which they are contained. Again, ſome of Chriſt's own miracles were *momentary*; as the tranſfiguration, the appearance and voice from heaven at his baptiſm, a voice from the clouds upon one occaſion afterwards (John xii. 30), and ſome others. It is not denied, that the diſtinction which we have propoſed concerning miracles of this ſpecies, applies, in diminution of the force of the evidence, as much to theſe inſtances as to others. But this is the caſe, not with all the miracles aſcribed to Chriſt, nor with the greateſt part, nor with many. Whatever force therefore there may be in the objection, we have numerous miracles which are free from

from it; and even thoſe to which it is applicable, are little affected by it in their credit, becauſe there are few, who, admitting the reſt, will reject *them*. If there be miracles of the New Teſtament, which come within any of the *other* heads into which we have diſtributed the objections, the ſame remark muſt be repeated. And this is one way in which the unexampled number and variety of the miracles aſcribed to Chriſt ſtrengthens the credibility of Chriſtianity. For it precludes any ſolution, or conjecture about a ſolution, which imagination, or even which experience might ſuggeſt concerning ſome particular miracles, if conſidered independently of others. The miracles of Chriſt were of various kinds *, and performed in great varieties of ſituation, form and manner; at Jeruſalem, the metropolis of the Jewiſh nation and religion; in different parts of Judea

* Not only healing every ſpecies of diſeaſe, but turning water into wine (John ii.); feeding multitudes with a few loaves and fiſhes (Mat. xiv. 14. Mark vi. 35. Luke ix. 12. John iv. 5.); walking on the ſea (Mat. xiv.

Judea and Galilee; in cities, in villages; in ſynagogues, in private houſes; in the ſtreet, in highways; with preparation, as in the caſe of Lazarus; by accident, as in the caſe of the widow's ſon at Nain; when attended by multitudes, and when alone with the patient; in the midſt of his diſciples, and in the preſence of his enemies; with the common people round him, and before Scribes and Phariſees, and rulers of the ſynagogues.

I apprehend that, when we remove from the compariſon the caſes which are fairly diſpoſed of by the obſervations that have been ſtated, many caſes will not remain. To thoſe which do remain, we apply this final diſtinction; " that there is not ſatisfactory evidence, that perſons, pretending to

xiv. 23.); calming a ſtorm (Mat. viii. 26. Luke viii. 23.); a celeſtial voice at his baptiſm, and miraculous appearance (Mat. iii. 17. afterwards John xii. 28.); his tranſfiguration (Mat. xvii. 1—8. Mark ix. 2. Luke ix. 28. 2 Ep. Peter i. 16, 17.); raiſing the dead in three diſtinct inſtances (Mat. ix. 18. Mark v. 22. Luke viii. 41. Luke vii. 14. John xi).

be

be original witneſſes of the miracles, paſſed their lives in labours, dangers and ſufferings, voluntarily undertaken and undergone in atteſtation of the accounts which they delivered, and properly in conſequence of their belief of the truth of thoſe accounts."

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

BUT they, with whom we argue, have undoubtedly a right to ſelect their own examples. The inſtances with which Mr. Hume hath choſen to confront the miracles of the New Teſtament, and which, therefore, we are entitled to regard as the ſtrongeſt which the hiſtory of the world could ſupply to the enquiries of a very acute and learned adverſary, are the three following:

1. The cure of a blind and of a lame man at Alexandria, by the Emperor Veſpaſian, as related by Tacitus;

2. The reſtoration of the limb of an attendant in a Spaniſh church, as told by Cardinal de Retz; and

3. The cures ſaid to be performed at the

tomb of the Abbé Paris, in the early part of the preſent century.

1. The narrative of Tacitus is delivered in theſe terms: "One of the common people of Alexandria, known to be diſeaſed in his eyes, by the admonition of the god Serapis, whom that ſuperſtitious nation worſhip above all other gods, proſtrated himſelf before the emperor, earneſtly imploring from him a remedy for his blindneſs, and entreating that he would deign to anoint with his ſpittle his cheeks and the balls of his eyes. Another, diſeaſed in his hand, requeſted, by the admonition of the ſame god, that he might be touched by the foot of the emperor. Veſpaſian at firſt derided and deſpiſed their application; afterwards when they continued to urge their petitions, he, ſometimes, appeared to dread the imputation of vanity; at other times, by the earneſt ſupplication of the patients, and the perſuaſion of his flatterers, to be induced to hope for ſucceſs. At length he commanded an enquiry to be made by the phyſicians, whether

ſuch a blindneſs and debility were vincible by human aid. The report of the phyſicians contained various points; that in the one the power of viſion was not deſtroyed, but would return if the obſtacles were removed; that, in the other, the diſeaſed joints might be reſtored, if a healing power were applied; that it was, perhaps, agreeable to the gods to do this; that the emperor was elected by divine aſſiſtance; laſtly, that the credit of the ſucceſs would be the emperor's, the ridicule of the diſappointment would fall upon the patients. Veſpaſian, believing that every thing was in the power of his fortune, and that nothing was any longer incredible, whilſt the multitude, which ſtood by, eagerly expected the event, with a countenance expreſſive of joy executed what he was deſired to do. Immediately the hand was reſtored to its uſe, and light returned to the blind man. They who were preſent, relate both theſe cures, even at this time, when there is nothing to be gained by lying*."

* Tac. Hiſt. lib. iv.

Now, though Tacitus wrote this account twenty-ſeven years after the miracle is ſaid to have been performed, and wrote at Rome of what paſſed at Alexandria, and wrote alſo from report; and although it does not appear that he had examined the ſtory, or that he believed it (but rather the contrary), yet I think his teſtimony ſufficient to prove that ſuch a tranſaction took place; by which I mean that the two men in queſtion did apply to Veſpaſian; that Veſpaſian did touch the diſeaſed in the manner related; and that a cure was reported to have followed the operation. But the affair labours under a ſtrong and juſt ſuſpicion, that the whole of it was a concerted impoſture brought about by colluſion between the patients, the phyſician, and the emperor. This ſolution is probable, becauſe there was every thing to ſuggeſt, and every thing to facilitate ſuch a ſcheme. The miracle was calculated to confer honour upon the emperor, and upon the god Serapis. It was achieved in the midſt of the emperor's flatterers and followers; in a city, and amongſt a populace,

a populace, beforehand devoted to his intereſt, and to the worſhip of the god; where it would have been treaſon and blaſphemy together to have contradicted the fame of the cure, or even to have queſtioned it. And what is very obſervable in the account is, that the report of the phyſicians is juſt ſuch a report as would have been made of a caſe, in which no external marks of the diſeaſe exiſted, and which, conſequently, was capable of being eaſily counterfeited, viz. that in the firſt of the patients, the organs of viſion were not deſtroyed, that the weakneſs of the ſecond was in his joints. The ſtrongeſt circumſtance in Tacitus's narration is, that the firſt patient was "*notus* tabe oculorum," remarked or notorious for the diſeaſe in his eyes. But this was a circumſtance which might have found its way into the ſtory in its progreſs from a diſtant country, and during an interval of thirty years; or it might be true that the malady of the eyes was notorious, yet that the nature and degree of the diſeaſe had never been aſcertained: a caſe by no means uncommon.

The emperor's reſerve was eaſily affected; or it is poſſible he might not be in the ſecret. There does not ſeem to be much weight in the obſervation of Tacitus, that they who were preſent continued even then to relate the ſtory when there was nothing to be gained by the lie. It only proves that thoſe who had told the ſtory for many years, perſiſted in it. The ſtate of mind of the witneſſes and ſpectators *at the time*, is the point to be attended to. Still leſs is there of pertinency in Mr. Hume's eulogium upon the cautious and penetrating genius of the hiſtorian; for it does not appear that the hiſtorian believed it. The terms in which he ſpeaks of Serapis, the deity to whoſe interpoſition the miracle was attributed, ſcarcely ſuffer us to ſuppoſe that Tacitus thought the miracle to be real, "by the admonition of the god Serapis, whom that ſuperſtitious nation (dedita ſuperſtitionibus gens) worſhip above all other gods." To have brought this ſuppoſed miracle within the limits of compariſon with the miracles of Chriſt, it ought to have appeared, that a perſon of a low

a low and private ſtation, in the midſt of enemies, with the whole power of the country oppoſing him, with every one around him prejudiced or intereſted againſt his claims and character, pretended to perform theſe cures; and required the ſpectators, upon the ſtrength of what they ſaw, to give up their firmeſt hopes and opinions, and follow *him* through a life of trial and danger; that many were ſo moved, as to obey his call, at the expence, both of every notion in which they had been brought up, and of their eaſe, ſafety and reputation; and that by theſe beginnings a change was produced in the world, the effects of which remain to this day: a caſe, both in its circumſtances and conſequences, very unlike any thing we find in Tacitus's relation.

2. The ſtory taken from the memoirs of Cardinal de Retz, which is the ſecond example alledged by Mr. Hume, is this: "In the church of Saragoſſa in Spain, the canons ſhewed me a man whoſe buſineſs it was to

light the lamps, telling me that he had been ſeveral years at the gate, with one leg only. I ſaw him with two *,"

It is ſtated by Mr. Hume, that the Cardinal who relates this ſtory, did not believe it; and it no where appears that he either examined the limb, or aſked the patient, or indeed any one, a ſingle queſtion about the matter. An artificial leg wrought with art would be ſufficient, in a place where no ſuch contrivance had ever before been heard of, to give origin and currency to the report. The eccleſiaſtics of the place would, it is probable, favour the ſtory, inaſmuch as it advanced the honour of their image and church. And if *they* patronized it, no other perſon at Saragoſſa, in the middle of the laſt century, would care to diſpute it. The ſtory likewiſe coincided, not leſs with the wiſhes and preconceptions of the people, than with the intereſts of their eccleſiaſtical rulers: ſo that there was prejudice backed

* Liv. iv. A. D. 1654.

by

by authority, and both operating upon extreme ignorance, to account for the ſucceſs of the impoſture. If, as I have ſuggeſted, the contrivance of an artificial limb was then new, it would not occur to the Cardinal himſelf to ſuſpect it; eſpecially under the careleſſneſs of mind with which he heard the tale, and the little inclination he felt to ſcrutinize or expoſe its fallacy.

3. The miracles related to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, admit in general of this ſolution. The patients who frequented the tomb, were ſo affected by their devotion, their expectation, the place, the ſolemnity, and, above all, by the ſympathy of the ſurrounding multitude, that many of them were thrown into violent convulſions, which convulſions, in certain inſtances, produced a removal of diſorders depending upon obſtruction. We ſhall, at this day, have the leſs difficulty in admitting the above account, becauſe it is the very ſame thing as hath lately been experienced in the operations of animal magnetiſm; and the

the report of the French phyſicians upon that myſterious remedy is very applicable to the preſent conſideration, viz. that the pretenders to the art, by working upon the imaginations of their patients, were frequently able to produce convulſions; that convulſions ſo produced are amongſt the moſt powerful, but, at the ſame time, moſt uncertain and unmanageable applications to the human frame, which can be employed.

Circumſtances, which indicate this explication in the caſe of the Pariſian miracles. are the following:

1. They were *tentative.* Out of many thouſand ſick, infirm, and diſeaſed perſons, who reſorted to the tomb, the profeſſed hiſtory of the miracles contains only nine cures.

2. The convulſions at the tomb are admitted.

3. The diſeaſes were, for the moſt part, of

of that ſort, which depends upon inaction and obſtruction, as dropſies, palſies, and ſome tumours.

4. The cures were gradual; ſome patients attending many days, ſome ſeveral weeks, and ſome ſeveral months.

5. The cures were many of them incomplete.

6. Others were temporary *.

So that all the wonder we are called upon to account for is, that out of an almoſt innumerable multitude which reſorted to the tomb for the cure of their complaints, and many of whom were there agitated by ſtrong convulſions, a very ſmall proportion experienced a beneficial change in their conſtitution, eſpecially in the action of the nerves and glands.

* The reader will find theſe particulars verified in the detail, by the accurate enquiries of the preſent biſhop of Sarum in his Criterion of miracles, p. 132 et ſeq.

Some

Some of the cafes alledged do not require that we ſhould have recourſe to this ſolution. The firſt caſe in the catalogue is ſcarcely diſtinguiſhable from the progreſs of a natural recovery. It was that of a young man, who laboured under an inflammation of one eye, and had loſt the ſight of the other. The inflamed eye was relieved, but the blindneſs of the other remained. The inflammation had before been abated by medicine; and the young man, at the time of his attendance at the tomb, was uſing a lotion of laudanum. And, what is a ſtill more material part of the caſe, the inflammation after ſome interval returned. Another caſe was that of a young man who had loſt his ſight by the puncture of an awl, and the diſcharge of the aqueous humour through the wound. The ſight, which had been gradually returning, was much improved during his viſit to the tomb, that is, probably in the ſame degree in which the diſcharged humour was replaced by freſh ſecretions. And it is obſervable, that theſe two are the only caſes, which, from their nature, ſhould ſeem unlikely to be affected by convulſions.

In

In one material reſpect I allow, that the Pariſian miracles were different from thoſe related by Tacitus, and from the Spaniſh miracle of the Cardinal de Retz. They had not, like them, all the power and all the prejudice of the country on their ſide to begin with. They were alledged by one party againſt another, by the Janſeniſts againſt the Jeſuits. Theſe were of courſe oppoſed and examined by their adverſaries. The conſequence of which examination was, that many falſehoods were detected, that with ſomething really extraordinary much fraud appeared to be mixed. And if ſome of the caſes, upon which deſigned miſrepreſentation could not be charged, were not at the time ſatisfactorily accounted for, it was becauſe the efficacy of ſtrong ſpaſmodic affections was not then ſufficiently known. Finally, the cauſe of Janſeniſm did not riſe by the miracles, but ſunk, although the miracles had the anterior perſuaſion of all the numerous adherents of that cauſe to ſet out with.

Theſe,

Theſe, let us remember, are the ſtrongeſt examples, which the hiſtory of ages ſupplies. In none of them was the miracle *unequivocal;* by none of them were eſtabliſhed prejudices and perſuaſions overthrown; of none of them did the credit make its way, in oppoſition to authority and power; by none of them were many induced to commit themſelves, and that in contradiction to prior opinions, to a life of mortification, danger, and ſufferings; none were called upon to atteſt them, at the expence of their fortunes and ſafety *.

* It may be thought that the hiſtorian of the Pariſian miracles, M. Montgeron, forms an exception to this laſt aſſertion. He preſented his book (with a ſuſpicion, as it ſhould ſeem, of the danger of what he was doing) to the king; and was ſhortly afterwards committed to priſon, from which he never came out. Had the miracles been unequivocal, and had M. Montgeron been originally convinced by them, I ſhould have allowed this exception. It would have ſtood I think, alone, in the argument of our adverſaries. But beſide what has been obſerved of the dubious nature of the miracles, the account which M. Montgeron has himſelf left of his converſion, ſhews both the ſtate of his mind, and *that his perſuaſion was not built upon external miracles.*

"Scarcely

"Scarcely had he entered the church-yard, when he was ſtruck," he tells us, "with awe and reverence, having never before heard prayers pronounced with ſo much ardour and tranſport, as he obſerved amongſt the ſupplicants at the tomb. Upon this, throwing himſelf on his knees, reſting his elbows on the tomb-ſtone, and covering his face with his hands, he ſpake the following prayer: *O thou, by whoſe interceſſion ſo many miracles are ſaid to be performed, if it be true that a part of thee ſurviveth the grave, and that thou haſt influence with the Almighty, have pity on the darkneſs of my underſtanding, and through his mercy obtain the removal of it.* Having prayed thus, "many thoughts," as he ſayeth, "began to open themſelves to his mind; and ſo profound was his attention that he continued on his knees four hours, not in the leaſt diſturbed by the vaſt crowd of ſurrounding ſupplicants. During this time all the arguments which he had ever heard or read in favour of Chriſtianity, occurred to him with ſo much force, and ſeemed ſo ſtrong and convincing, that he went home fully ſatiſfied of the truth of religion in general, and of the holineſs and power of that perſon, who," as he ſuppoſed, "had engaged the divine goodneſs to enlighten his underſtanding ſo ſuddenly." Douglaſs Crit. of Mir. p. 214.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.